

Jan Fries

Seidways



shaking, swaying and serpent mysteries

Seidways

Shaking, swaying and serpent mysteries



Jan Fries

Copyright © 1996 by J Fries and Mandrake of Oxford
First edition

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or utilized in any form by any means electronic or mechanical, including *xerography, photocopying, microfilm, and recording*, or by any information storage system without permission in writing from the author.

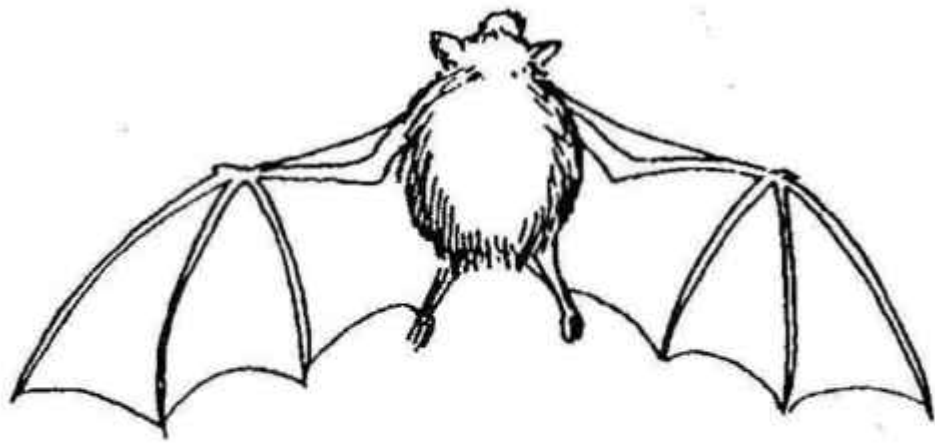
Published by
Mandrake of Oxford
PO Box 250
OXFORD
OX1 1AP (UK)

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library and the US Library of Congress.

ISBN 1 869928 36 9

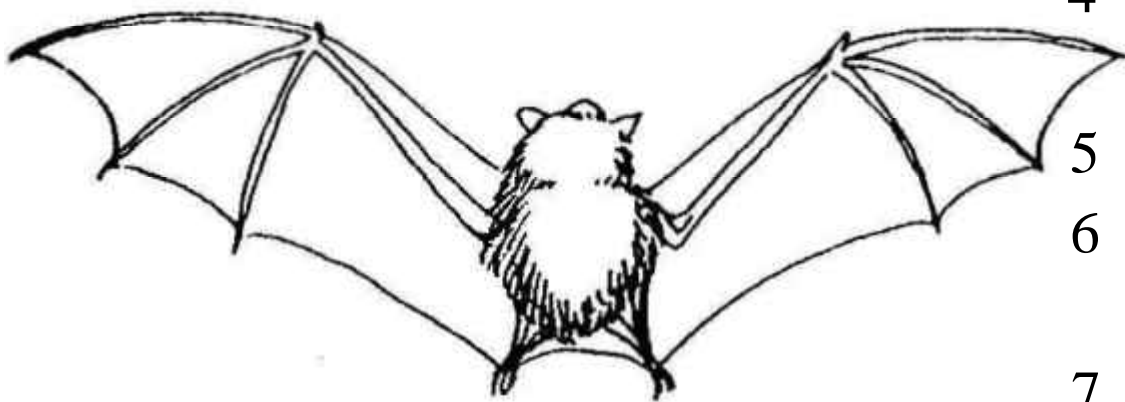
Also by Jan Fries and published by Mandrake of Oxford
Visual Magick - a manual of freestyle shamanism
Helmnar - a manual of rune magick.

Printed in Great Britain by Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire



Contents

1	The First Word from the Cauldron.....	5
2	The Serpent Stone.....	11
3	The Sacred Disease.....	20
4	The Num and the Kia.....	44
5	Horses of the Zar.....	52
6	Kami of the Sacred Peaks.....	58
7	The Second Coming of Christ.....	66
8	Seidr Under Midnight Skies.....	73
9	Spells of Suomi.....	97
10	Introduction to the Practice.....	119
11	Seething Practice.....	122
12	Rhythms and the Mind.....	137
13	Attention and Involvement.....	164
14	Feeding the Spirits.....	173
15	Dragon Lore.....	186
16	A Tangle of Serpents	206
17	Gods and Giants.....	229
18	Visions of Taliesin.....	265
19	The Cauldron of Ceridwen.....	298
	Selected Bibliography	319
	Discography.....	325
	Index.....	327





1 The First Word from the Cauldron

I have been told that introductions stand no chance of being read, no matter how valuable their information-content, unless they include a bit of excitement right in the first few lines.

Well then, how would you like this? As far as magical books go (this depends on how far their readers take them) this one is almost about sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll. Almost, but not quite.

It is also about dragons, about cauldrons, and about the darker side of pagan religion and magick in ancient Europe. After writing *Helrunar* there was quite a lot of bizarre information left over, which just wouldn't fit into a handbook of rune-sorcery. This information stewed in the pot for a few years. Then it asked for a place on paper, and here we go. Some of this stuff is obscure, some is speculative. Very little of it pretends to be factual, unless the reader chooses to believe and make it so. I do not ask you to believe, instead, I would like to challenge you to do your own research, come to your own insights, and to construct your own working hypothesis as you go along. This goes for the theories, but even more so for the practises. If you choose to experiment with the techniques described in this volume, let me remind you that you, and you alone, are responsible for what happens. Some of the practises are definitely not suited for everyone, most require a degree

6 First Word from the Cauldron

of magical experience, and all require good health of mind and body. If you are a beginner in trance magick, I would strongly suggest that you master a few basic skills before attempting any of the techniques in this volume - skills like visualization, self-hypnosis, astral projection and earthing energies. For these techniques you could consult my earlier books. More important yet is the ability to communicate with what might be called 'the deep mind', the 'holy guardian angel', the 'fylgia' etc., as these are the parts of the self which make the magick work.

Well then... what was this about sex? This book is almost about sex, insofar as it deals with pulsation, with trances that excite and energise, that make the body shudder, sweat and glow. This is not the usual sort of sex, such as is commonly practised on Friday night so as not to interfere with the demands of the working week. What we deal with are phenomena like lust and living flesh. Think of what Austin Spare termed 'the new sexuality', a concept that is miles away from simple male-female role-playing. What Spare thought of was the sexual interaction of the T and the 'all-otherness', the lust of awareness in all of its forms, and the transcendence arising from going beyond. How about drugs then? Sorry, but this is not a book on what happens to people who get high on things cooked up in bathtubs and sold at street-corners. It is more concerned with things that people cook up in their own brains, with the hormones and neurotransmitters which the brain produces naturally. I wouldn't call such substances 'drugs', as all drugs are just crude attempts to approximate the effects of the mind's own elixirs. And rock 'n' roll? Can you sense the rhythm? There is a rhythm to trance work. There is a rhythm in ritual, and there is a lot of rhythm in the shaking and swaying trances. Rhythm can stabilize awareness. It can change awareness, and some rhythms can lead your mind on a journey to yourself.

And it's a book of exploration. A good many of the trance practises on these pages have been used by cultures all over the globe, starting, I suspect, quite early in the Stone Ages. For a variety of reasons, these trances have fallen out of use in Europe and in the 'modern world', which means that hereabouts people have to re-discover methods

which seem new but are as ancient as they come. A lot of cultures practice these trances in our day and age, which supplied me with a wealth of useful data. Few magicians are aware of what treasures can be found in a good ethnological library; if they knew, they would feel rather silly about their own vows of secrecy. Most of the great magical secrets have been published time and time again in the unlikeliest of places, but it does take an inspired eye to recognize them.

When the first European scholars studied the shamanic seances of Siberia, they were swift to call them a mixture of quack-doctoring and plain insanity. Given their cultural background, what other conclusion could they reach? Similar practices are well-documented from pagan Europe, sadly, they have been ignored for a long time. Ecstatic people have long been treated as if they were lunatics, and when the church came to power, it soon declared that the pagan ways go straight to Hell. The very sort of behaviour that many cultures seek in their healers and priests was attributed to the Devil, and rigorously punished.

Yet people shake. A body in trance can easily begin to sway, especially if the mind is busy elsewhere, and shaking and trembling are not far from this phenomena. I found it happening when I was a child. I used to draw pictures. In the process, when pausing to consider the picture, I used to get extremely excited. This excitement expressed itself in trembling. Many a time the hand holding the pen started the quivering, and often enough, the rest of the body joined in. This led to a number of interesting and void-minded consciousness states, improved my ability to see and imagine, and scared my parents considerably. They suspected brain damage, and had me examined by several doctors, who could not find anything wrong. I soon got the impression (that shaking was undesirable, and began to struggle against it. It wasn't easy, but for several years I managed to avoid it. Then came magick, excitement and madness, and soon enough the shaking returned. I felt very uneasy about it at first, but when I learned that there are cultures which actually invite it as a sign of spiritual grace (or total obsession), I felt compelled to allow it once more. For some years I assumed that the shaking is a side-effect of intense mental activity. Then I learned that

8 First Word from the Cauldron

it can work both ways - that intense mental activity can be a side-effect of shaking, and that one can lead to the other naturally. This led to the next question: was this just a personal phenomenon or could it be learned by others? At first, only a few people dared to experiment - Julia, Astrid, Gavin, Ruth - whose support has done much to make this book possible. They tried, they experimented, and developed their own access to shaking trances and inspired rituals. They taught me about individual differences in shaking and swaying, and about the necessity to develop one's own working method. These experiences were the beginning of this book.

From this point, things became easy. All of a sudden a great deal of useful information turned up, such as books, films, recordings, dreams, and better still, people who had experienced the shaking one way or another, without quite understanding what was happening to them. Some of my friends were kind enough to write of their experience, such as Gavin W. Semple, Shantidevi and Nema/Maggie of the Maat Network. I have included their accounts as they are lucid and information, and even more so as I believe in offering you several points of view. For the same reason a lot of quotations have been included. If you really wish to understand a phenomenon, the first step is to consider as many points of view as possible. Kenneth Grant offered some scintillating suggestions which helped a lot to fuse this book together and permitted me to quote from our correspondence, and Mogg and the Oxford Golden Dawn Occult Society gave me the chance to present the practise to a wider audience during the Thelemic symposiums of 1992 and 1993, when scores of people found that they could shake, trance, and enjoy it. This book is a way of saying 'thank you' to all of you.

A note on seething

On these pages, I have occasionally taken the liberty to identify the shaking and swaying trances with a shamanic practice of the north

Germanic cultures which was called *Seidr*, or seething. I have some personal, and utterly subjective reasons for this use of the term 'seething', most of them having to do with the fact that the metaphor describes the shaking pretty well. In this place I wish to point out that, as far as I know, there exists no full proof that the seidmages of the old north actually shook while they tranced, prophesied or projected glammers. There are, I believe, some indications which make it likely that they did, but I don't want to give the appearance of 'fact' when we are dealing with inspired guesswork. Very little is actually known about the activities of the seid-men and women of the pagan times. You'll find an account of it, and my reasons for the use of the term 'seething' in the chapter 'Seidr Under Midnight Skies'. If any reader has better knowledge on this issue, I would love to hear about it.

Notes on transliteration

The correct spelling of Seidr is with the consonant *ð*, which is pronounced like the 'th' in thorn. But for convenience, this has been simplified to Seidr throughout this book



2 The Serpent Stone

In the year 77AD Pliny the Elder published his famous *Natural History*. Besides describing numerous miracles of nature, the volumes offer an insight into Druidic belief and practice which is all the more valuable as Pliny had seen military service in northern Europe. This adds a measure of personal experience to the account. Speaking of Druidic rituals, Pliny gives that often quoted tale how mistletoe plants are cut from oak branches, which is not an easy feat as mistletoe tends to grow on poplar, willow and apple. Brief as the description is, it is still the only Druid ritual described in any detail by the classical authors, which goes to show just how little is known of Druidic ritual and custom. Pliny also describes some magical plants which have to be collected with great ceremony. The plant 'selago', for instance, had to be cut without using iron, and was taken by the right hand which had to pass through the left sleeve. Before daring this operation, the Druid had to assume white clothing, wash the feet and make an offering of wine and bread. The plant was carried as a charm against every kind of evil. We do not know the modern name of 'selago', but there are quite a few plants which were carried as talismans right up to modern times. For instance a rowan twig can scare evil spirits and a small knot made out of a thin rowan twig can be set up to protect a house. Mugwort appears in the old English blessing of the nine herbs as 'Una is your name, oldest among worts', with power against 'three and against thirty', and the mountain or forest primrose, if carried secretly, could act as a key to open the gates to the underworld, the hidden realm of the kings from under the hill. St John's wort, especially when taken at the summer

12 The Serpent Stone

solstice (St John's Day), was well known to scare devils and demons into hasty flight. A loop of the plant, tied to the roof, was used to protect houses from lightning. The root of the tall mullein had a similar reputation, provided it was taken on a Friday night between 15th August and 8th September, during a waning moon. Both of the dates are related to Mary, mother of Christ, and the time between them was known to be especially beneficial for the collection of magical herbs. Better known still was the fern. Parts of the root of fern used to be carved into the shape of a crude hand or fist, which was carried as a talisman. A common European folk belief has it that the most potent of all talismans is the seed of flowering fern. Such seeds are known to bring fantastic good luck, wealth, fame and the ability to become invisible. However, getting them is not very easy. As you may know, fern has no blossoms and produces no proper seeds, but spores. To collect blossoms and seeds, you have to be exceptionally lucky. Only on one midsummer night in a hundred years does the fern produce flowers and seeds, which develop in a few short hours and wither before sunrise. The would-be collector has to be at the right spot at the right time. S/he should place a pure white cloth under and around the fern, then sit back to wait and pray. Sometime in the middle of the night the fern is said to glow and radiate brightly. Then blossom and seeds appear at the same time, and the collector should gather them swiftly with the white cloth. This should be done fast, the legends say, as all the elves and forest spirits are hungry for the blossoms and seeds, and will try to take them by force. Holding fast to the cloth, the lucky collector should run as fast as possible, and cross running water speedily.

This is quite close to the account that Pliny wrote of an amulet known as 'The Serpent's Egg' (Nat. History XXIX, 52)

There is also another kind of egg, of much renown in the Gallic provinces, but ignored by the Greek. In the summer, numberless snakes entwine themselves into a ball, held together by a secretion from their bodies and by their spittle. This is called 'anguinum'. The Druids say that hissing serpents throw this up into the air, and that

it must be caught in a cloak, and not allowed to touch the ground [just like the sacred mistletoe], and that one must instantly take flight on horse-back, as the serpents will pursue until some stream cuts them off. It may be tested, they say, by seeing if it floats against the current of a river, even though it be set in gold. But as it is the way of magicians to cast a cunning veil about their frauds, they pretend that these eggs can only be taken on a certain day of the moon, as though it rested with mankind to make the moon and the serpents accord as to the moment of the operation. I myself, however, have seen one of these eggs; it was round and about as large as a smallish apple; the shell was cartilaginous, and pocked like the arms of a polypus. The Druids esteem it highly. It is said to ensure success in law-suits and a favourable reception with princes...

So much for Pliny's account. This story is surprisingly well-known and can be found, in various distorted forms, all over northern Europe. Likewise, an amazing variety of objects have been called 'serpent eggs' or 'serpent stones', and sold for exceptional prices to the superstitious. Petrified ammonites with their spiral shells, were often called 'snake stones', as were the shells of sea-urchins, which appear somewhat like the object that Pliny saw (once the spikes are removed). Another object frequently considered a 'serpent egg' is the common glass bead, which has been found all over northern Europe. Celtic artisans were skilful in making beads of glass, and enamel, in gorgeous tones of blue and green, often decorated with eyes or streaks in white or yellow. According to T. Kendrick's brilliant study *The Druids* (1927) such glass beads were known as 'snake stones' in Cornwall, Wales and Scotland. It is highly unlikely that the Celts who knew the secret of their manufacture would have attributed such beads to the *convention* of serpents. What, then, is this serpent egg, apart from being a metaphor? An interesting variation of the myth comes from Finland and the Finno-Ugric countries such as Lapland, Karelia, East-Bottnia, Estland, Lettland and Ingermanland. Closely related myths are known from Sweden, Norway, Germany, and the alpine countries.

14 The Serpent Stone

According to A.V. Rantasalo (1959) there exists a large amount of serpent stone talismans in Finnish museums. These stones, unlike the egg that Pliny describes, appear very unremarkable. Usually such serpent stones are small, round or roundish, and of various colours. Quite a few of them have small scratch-marks around the edges, which are said to be the bite marks of the serpents. Like the serpent egg of Pliny, such stones were known to produce good luck when worn on the body or sewn into the clothes. Pliny mentions a Roman knight, who wore a serpent's egg during a trial, and was put to death by the Emperor Claudius for his attempt to influence the court. Similar tales, with different persons, are told of the serpent stone. Winning a serpent stone is quite as tough as collecting fern blossoms. It is said - and there are several variations to the tale - that once a year the serpents gather to adore their holy stone and to elect a new serpent king. Of course, this ceremony takes place at a secret place, far from the world of men, out on the heather, deep in the forest, on a lonesome hilltop, near a hidden spring, or at a place where great rocks rest. From all over the country the serpents come stealthily, gliding through the bracken, to the sacred place of worship. Here the serpent stone is kept concealed. The serpents gather in silence and form a circle around the stone. Then they rear up, as high as they can, and slowly, ever so slowly, they begin to sway. There is a pulse to this rite, and a hidden rhythm. The serpents sway from side to side, fore and back; they sway in lines, in circles, their cold eyes staring fiercely at the stone. As the swaying proceeds, the entire circle seems to pulse. The serpent-king picks up the stone and holds it in his mouth. Then the serpents do something very odd for reptiles: they begin to whistle as they sway. The king passes the stone to the serpent next to him, and so the stone is given, from mouth to mouth, all round the circle. Each serpent chews the stone, sucks it, adds its bite marks, until at last it comes to the king once more, who places it in the centre of the congregation. In some versions of the tale, the serpents then proceed to elect their new king. This is done by having a race down the hill to a selected spring. The serpent that arrives first is made king for the new year, the one that comes last is sacrificed 'for

the sins of all serpents'. In one version, the condemned serpent is spat at until the poison petrifies it in the form of a ring. Then the serpents glide through the ring, hide their sacred stone, and go their own ways. Humans have only one chance of obtaining the stone. When the stone lies in the centre of the assembly, a daring human can hurl a cloak into the serpents, jump into the middle, seize the stone and run or ride. This has to happen very fast, as serpents are said to be runners with a lot of stamina. More often than not they catch up with the thief, who may buy time by dropping pieces of clothing to confuse the pursuers, and who is certainly slain by serpent poison unless s/he crosses running water or a freshly ploughed field.

What do you make of this bizarre tale? The image of the swaying and whistling serpents brings no reptiles to my mind but humans deep into serpent consciousness. Is there an old serpent-cult ritual reflected in the myth? There is a 'serpent stone' in Scotland where allegedly nineteen serpents with one white serpent among them were slain during a great battle between the shepherds (Christians?) and the reptiles (see Anne Ross 1967).

Think of the Dhuliya people in Assam, who honour their serpent goddess Manasa with a swaying dance. During this rite the serpent-priestess Deodhani, who is dedicated to the goddess and lives in chastity all through her life, dances with open hair. She swings her hair, slowly at first and then with increasing vehemence, in circles, spirals and figure eight motions. When the goddess obsesses her the swaying and swinging gets wilder. Soon she begins to rotate on the spot, then she Collapses, transforms, and arises, deeply in trance and fully obsessed by serpent consciousness. In Sri Lanka a serpent-dance used to be popular. A serpent-priest, called Pullavan, used to tour the country, travelling from village to village to invoke the serpent power in the 'Pambu Thullal', the ceremony of the dancing snakes.

According to E. Rebling (1982) the priest began by forming brightly coloured serpents (Rebling does not mention how the serpent images are formed, and what materials are used for this purpose), a dancing before their shrine with a torch. Now began the dance of the

16 The Serpent Stone

two women who were usually quite young. They began by swaying very slowly. After a while, the tempo increases, becoming fast and wild, until they became ecstatic and people knew that serpent consciousness had come over them. From that point, it was the serpent power which moved the dancers. If the serpent power moved one or both dancers to the shrine, and made them offer coconut blossoms, this was a sure sign that the serpent deities were content. If the dancers collapsed with exhaustion before reaching the shrine, this was not very auspicious and the rite had to be repeated the next evening.

These tales suggest some interesting experiments. Like seething, swaying can be used to change consciousness. The pulse is slower, and the rite is more tranquil, unless one wishes to become wild and excited, and speeds the swaying up. For a start, I would like to remind you of a time when swaying really changed your awareness. For instance when you were a baby, a peculiar swaying could soothe you to sleep. There was a special rhythm to it, you may remember, and if you have children of your own, you may know that the right soothing rhythm was not necessarily a slow one. Some children go to sleep if you hold them and dance, and wake up screaming as soon as you slow down or stop.

Think of a time when you were desperately sleepy. Maybe you noticed that your head began nodding all on its own volition, each nod a little deeper than the one before, the eyelids getting heavier, until all of a sudden the ground leaped up at you.

Swaying can also happen naturally when people are deep in thought, daydreaming, exhausted or slightly drunk. Swaying on purpose can allow access to some useful states of mind. As in seething, much depends on speed, intensity and the purpose of the rite. For a start, you could try the following. Stand erect, with your feet closely together, close your eyes and feel your body. Calm the breathing. Feel how you are standing. Can you tell the centre of gravity? Notice how your weight shifts in minimal motions, how your body sways, ever so slightly, to keep you in balance. Or try the opposite. Stand as before, and try to be as still as possible. Avoid swaying, tense your muscles, wait a while. Close your eyes and concentrate on being completely immobile. When

you open your eyes, look at the ground or at yourself in a mirror. You'll find it pretty difficult to avoid swaying under such conditions.

Now for amplification. A very simple method consists of pretending to be a serpent, which may soon lead to *being* a serpent, and swaying gracefully. Another way is to imagine that you are very soft and flexible. Imagine you are as light as a feather, as light as the summer grasses swaying in the wind. Or imagine you are a young tree, and imagine how the wind is moving you. Or imagine you are standing up to your waist in the ocean. The clear, fresh water is moving you, pulling your hips, moving you sideways, lifting you off your feet and setting you down again. Can you imagine the foam on the waves, the roar of the breakers and smell the salt and iodine on the breeze? The more you go into the experience, the closer you associate with it, the more vivid will it be. What else do you know that sways naturally?

As you experiment, you may soon learn how to sway best. Try to increase the swaying, or to slow it. Try swaying from the feet, swaying from the hips, swaying from the waist, and swaying of the head alone. Exaggerate the motions or minimalise them. There are several states of awareness which can be enjoyed using different types of swaying, which means that you are wise if you experiment a lot. Maybe you would like to accompany your swaying with sound. If you are a serpent, you could hiss as you sway forward, and hiss another way as you sway back. If you 'stand in the ocean', make wave sounds as the waters gently pull and push you. Such activity aligns your swaying to your breathing, and makes the trance more developed.

In *Visual Magick* a hypnotic style of speaking was described which made use of slow speech, only a few words to each breath. Try it while you sway. Use a pleasant inner voice, a calm and gentle one, or whisper if you like ... and you can allow ... your mind ... to choose ... a few ... fitting... words... with each breath... and the ebb... and flow... of your swaying... going slowly... so the words... and the swaying... suit each other ... as you move ... as you are moved ... and body moves ... and breath flows... and you describe... what you sense... and sense... what you describe ... so the words ... and the motions ... in tune ... with

18 The Serpent Stone

yourself... may lead you ... as you enjoy ... the rhythm ... into a lovely ... trance-rhythm ... changing ... your awareness ... and offering ... choices ... and pleasure ... as you sway ...

This is only an example of course. Go slowly, pause often, give yourself time. Last, I would like to mention swaying in a seated position on the floor. Certain Muslim sects have a form of worship that has all participants sitting cross-legged on the ground. The name of Allah is recited, or religious hymns are sung, and in the same rhythm, the participants swing their upper torso forward and back, or in circles, which leads to interesting trance states. As before, a slow rhythm tends to calm, while fast swaying, to a fast rhythm, can build up excitement and lead, just like wild shaking and dancing, into states of ecstasy. For rites of evocation, I have found it useful to sit and sway. As I call, evoke and chant, I tend to strike the earth before me in a regular rhythm, using my hand, a wand, or a bone. This binds a lot of the excitement to a certain pulsation, and strongly suggests that the god or spirit is to 'come here'. I've found it useful to meet the spirits of a new and unknown place, or to call beings out of the depth. Another field of experiment can be found in allowing the head to sway or nod gently. Try the subtle motions, the almost imperceptible swaying of the head, and combine this with inner silence and emptiness. There is a certain type of nodding, a small and gentle motion which, when practised for a while, can give a sense of 'unreality' to the surroundings. Pursued further, it seems to dissociate the surroundings, especially when you allow your vision to go wide, and listen to your inner silence. After further swaying, you may find yourself in a state of vacuity, or inner absence, in-between worlds. This is a useful state which can be used to work divination, see visions or invoke other entities. In our culture, nodding is also used to signify 'yes', while shaking the head sideways indicates 'no'. What happens when you do these motions, gently and lightly, for a while? Did you ever find yourself swaying or nodding as you stared at some sigil, symbol, or altar arrangement? Excellent! There is much more to be discovered here!



3 The Sacred Disease

To this day, a system of shamanism has survived among the northern Magar who live high in the mountains of Nepal. There, the 'shamans' call themselves by the title 'Rama', which means 'spotted birds', recalling their mythical ancestor, the self-born first shaman Rama Puran Tsan. At the dawn of the iron age, Rama Puran Tsan had climbed the world tree. Above the earth and below the sky, between the worlds, Rama Puran Tsan found vision and insight. He saw that the many diseases afflicting the people were caused by spirits, deities and witches, and learned that the invisible ones were ever hungry for blood. Clinging to the tree, the first shaman came to an agreement with the spirits.

Magar shamans keep this myth alive by means of ritual. Young Rama are still being initiated atop a symbolic world tree, so that each novice gains the same experience as the ancestor of the craft. Michael Oppitz (1981) has documented this initiation ceremony in book form and as a four hour documentary movie. You can find a brief description of the rite in *Helrunar*, where it is compared with the self-initiation of Odin. For the Western observer, Magar shamanism involves a lot of rather revolting behaviour. Quite frequently during the healing ceremonies, goats and sheep are slaughtered, and their blood is offered to the spirits that caused the disease. More so, there is a lot of wild and seemingly crazy behaviour. In their trances, the Rama tend to be obsessed by their helping spirits. They snort and grunt when the wild boar spirit indwells them, they speak in 'fictional Tibetan', a 'nonsense language', when

they house the lama spirit. They beat their frame drums for hours, chanting the traditional songs that invite the ghosts and spirits and, above all, whenever the excitement overwhelms them, they tremble and shake all over.

All of these are well-known and culturally expected elements of the healing ceremonies. When the drums thunder and the chant of the nine witch-sisters echoes through the village, this rite is witnessed by healers, patient and the patient's family. If the seance is an important one, many of the neighbours may assemble on nearby rooftops or stand staring through the windows. Occasionally, it may happen that a child or youngster gets excited by the dramatic event, and begins to shake and tremble in empathy. This may be interpreted as a sign that the spirits have chosen the child for the sacred vocation. Soon the young one will receive training by an older member of the craft. For our chosen one, this time is far from easy. There are rites and purifications, spells and chants, and above all, the spirits have to be encountered. Long before the actual initiation, the candidate receives a number of helping spirits, which are sealed up in bamboo tubes. At first, these spirits are wild and fierce, instead of helping the novice, they tend to upset and terrify. It takes months for the candidate to find a workable agreement with the spirits. During this time, and especially when participating in ceremonies, outbursts of uncontrolled and frenzied behaviour are a common event. The fierce moods of the spirits may upset the novice, may even bring the candidate to harm, so that the older healers are required to soothe the spirits, and the novice, when things get out of hand. When healing seances are held and blood is shed for the spirits, the new spirits of the novice may become especially wild. They may demand a share of the blood, disturb the ritual and toss the novice around with great brutality. With the passage of time, however, the young Rama learns to 'ride' these outbursts, learns to control the intensity of the shaking, learns to cultivate an awareness that combines obsessive frenzy and remote watchfulness. The shaking fits become smoother, and the rite, no longer a time of crisis, becomes an opportunity to practise the art of healing. Though their seances may seem fierce, the Magar Rama are

22 The Sacred Disease

inclined to enjoy themselves, to joke and fool around, which may be of vital importance to dissolve the dead-serious beliefs of the suffering patient.

When, at long last, the novice receives the full and ceremonial initiation on the world tree, this rite of exhaustion and transformation seals and confirms a union with the spirits which has been going on for quite some time. It is no surprise that in the Magar villages, children enjoy 'playing Rama'. For this purpose they pretend to climb the world tree, or imitate a healing seance, and of course, shaking is part of the game. A few of these children persist in such games, and these may well grow up to become the next generation of inspired healers.

The vocation of a Rama is seen as a duty, and an uneasy one, by the Magar people. Generally, the Rama regulate the affairs between the visible and invisible worlds. In practise, they are consulted for some public rituals and spend many a night haggling with the spirits responsible for diseases, ill-luck and accidents. A healing may require several nights of ritual and ceremony, especially when the patient has 'Lost her/his soul' (i.e. the will to live). Often, the Magar believe diseases are caused when the patient offends the spirits, so that an important part of the ceremony requires the Rama to placate the angry spirits, and to buy their good intentions with gifts of food and, as ever, fresh blood. It is an interesting detail that the Rama derive their ability to haggle with the spirits by being in league with them. This struggle is far from easy. The spirits of disease are well-known for their dangerous moods. Their power is obvious from the suffering of a patient, and unless special precautions are taken, they may assault the relations of the patient or even the healer.

The Magar Rama cultivate an attitude of humility and humour. The whole village knows how successful a healer is, and knows that 'you can't win them all', so that the occasional death of a patient, though a sad event, has to be accepted. The Magar Rama, though they gain some status from their contact with the spirits, do not gain much profit from their healing rituals. Indeed, as Oppitz points out, few Magar are interested in becoming Rama, as this vocation involves a lot of work and

danger for very little pay. The fees for healing are minimal and in no relation to the many nights a healing may take. As a consequence, most Magar Rama have to make do with very little sleep. They cannot survive on what they earn by night and have to get up and work on the fields by day as everybody else does. This makes exhaustion a constant companion. You will probably be aware how tiredness can affect the quality of mediation and trance work. To offset the effects of weariness and lack of sleep, the Rama have to make use of excitement and wild behaviour. I suspect that the shaking plays an important part in this practise. I have often observed that shaking trances tend to clear my mind and allow me to function lucidly on occasions when I'm far too tired for normal forms of meditation.

It comes as no surprise that the women and men who become Rama among the northern Magar are chosen by the spirits and have little choice about the matter. It is the spirits who determine a likely candidate, and provide refinement through rapture, madness and obsession. Whether this is a curse or a blessing depends on what the candidate makes out of the union.

The shuddering that characterises the response of the shaman to the excitement of the rite is an international phenomenon. Let us now consider the cultures of Siberia, where the word 'shaman' was coined and European researchers were first confronted with the practise. The word 'shaman' is derived from the Sanskrit 'Sram', which has a number of meanings, such as 'to heat oneself', 'to burn' and 'to practise austerities'. The former concept with its connotations of heat and fire, comes close to the term 'Seidr', the metaphor of the seething fluids which was chosen by northern European sorcerers to designate their activity. In the Tungusian language, the word 'shaman' means 'lifted up', 'exalted', or 'excited', which is fairly close to the original Sanskrit root. In the native Siberian setting, a shaman is an inspired individual who functions as a healer. Healing, among the Tungusian people, used to be an activity requiring contact and communication with the spirits. All diseases and afflictions were thought to come from the spirits, from an underworld of disease or from hungry entities that desired to feed

24 The Sacred Disease

on offerings and sacrifices. Now the spirits of Siberia are a tough breed. Like the spirits of other cultures, they took much of their nature and appearance from the natural world surrounding the community. Siberia is the coldest region of the earth and survival is harder than in many other places. It is a common element of shamanism that shamans and seers tend to encounter the spirits when they are alone in the wilderness.

Consider the following account. It comes from the pen of Wilhelm Radloff, who saw a shamanic seance in the Altai region in the last century. According to Radloff, the one

... whom the ancestors have chosen to become a shaman feels suddenly a tiredness in all limbs. An intense shaking comes over him, a mighty, unnatural yawning. Great pressure lies on his chest and he feels the urge to utter sudden, intense and wild screams. Fever-cramps shake him, he rolls his eyes, then suddenly he leaps to his feet and whirls madly in circles, until he collapses, drenched with sweat, and twists on the ground in quivering convulsions. (...) His suffering increases until he reaches for the drum and begins to shamanize. Then, at last, his condition calms. The force of the ancestors has been transferred to him. He cannot help it, he has to follow his vocation and function as a shaman...' (W. Radloff *Aus Sibirien*, Vol II, Leipzig 1884, quoted after O. Rinne).

This description, which happens to be one of the few reliable accounts of Siberian shamanism, involves a lot of interesting elements. You probably realised that the ferocity of the trance, which appeared like a mad fit to the European observer, was fully expected by the Siberian audience. All over the world, shamans have to satisfy the beliefs and expectations of their cultures. Patients know what they can expect from their healers, and a wise healer has to live up to this belief. Then, there is the timing of the rite. In Radloff's account, and in the descriptions of other scholars, the shaman first enters a rather wild trance state. Then he picks up the drum and proceeds with the ritual. Uno Harva, quoted after O. Rinne, gives a similar tale from the Burjati people:

The condition of a new shaman grows steadily worse. He ceases to eat and sleep, in the evening and at night he is haunted by ills. He trembles, leaps about and gnashes his teeth. Then his relations hand him the shaman's drum, as accords the old custom, so he may receive the ecstasy of the spirits.

This may surprise some new-age shamans, who tend to assume that shamans drum themselves into trance before they set out to perform super-human feats of healing. Assuredly some shamans may do that, but on the whole most accounts describe shamans who go into trance by means of shaking, swaying and mad behaviour before they even reach for the drum. May I propose that the shamans use their drums to drum the patient and the audience into trance? Certain rhythms are well known to ease the onset of trance in people who listen passively. More so, there is some evidence that patients who enjoy a light trance state recover more easily and that the immune system works better when the patient dozes, day-dreams or floats around in half-sleep. In this sense, the drum, or better, the rhythm, can be considered as a tool that helps the patient into a state where healing happens more easily. I would like to emphasise this point, as certain new-age shamans place far too much importance on the role of the healer. They pretend that the shaman - generally a person who owns a cowboy hat and an ethnic drum - uses the drumming to go into a trance state, in which condition s/he proceeds to work miracles, such as sucking diseases out of the patient or restoring a lost soul. In this model, the god-like shaman heals a patient who has nothing to do with the procedure. Well, a shaman in trance may be well and good, but more important is a patient in trance who gets a chance to reform thinking and belief.

The shaman's function lies in allowing the patient to find healing for her or himself. A skilful shaman may produce an atmosphere, a setting which makes it easier for the patient to recover. This last and crucial step, however, is the responsibility of the patient.

Radloff's account is not far from the description of a disease or madness. Indeed Siberian shamanism is closely connected with both

26 The Sacred Disease

phenomena. Among the Jakuti, Burjati and Tungusian people, to mention just a few cultures of Siberia which developed a form of shamanism, it was part of the tradition that shamans-to-be became moody, delirious or even insane for months or years. People about to become shamans could not be distinguished from people who were dangerously crazy. Future shamans were inclined to suffer fits of temper, vomiting, nausea; they tended to withdraw from society, to flee into the snow-covered forest, or they became weak and sleepy and stayed in a comatose condition for weeks. A good many of them became so weak that they came close to death. In states beyond sleeping and waking, the spirits came and carried the shaman's soul into the otherworld, where initiation was found and the new shaman learned to heal others. This initiation took place in a variety of astral settings. Some shamans grew up in nests that were fixed to the branches of the world tree, usually a larch or spruce. Others travelled to the underground realm of the ancestors, or found the underworld of diseases. In most of the recorded cases, the spirits, gods, ghosts, beasts or ancestors chopped the shaman up or tore the body to pieces. A Jakuti belief states that the spirits of the deceased shamans come to cut the novice apart. They scoop up her or his blood, using the drum mallet as a ladle, and pour it over the springs and roots of disease. The flesh they cut into small pieces and scatter on the paths of ill-luck. When the spirits of disease and death feed on the flesh and blood, the shaman-to-be gains power over them. Indeed, the Jakuti believe that shamans can only handle those diseases whose spirits fed on the shaman's body during the initiation. Thus, a good shaman has to feed as many death-dealing entities as possible. After the dismemberment, the shaman is re-assembled once more. One Burjati tradition claims that the bits and pieces are thrown into a cauldron, where they stew until they are ready for reformation. Another tradition has the spirits sort the bones, and claims that the bones of the novice are tied together with wire. Then they are re-clothed with flesh, and soon enough our former initiate wakes from the trance, revealing an entirely new state of mind. This ritual of dismemberment has consequences. Many Siberian cultures

believe that the birth of a new shaman costs the lives of a number of relations. During the dismemberment, the spirits sort out the bones. There are nine basic bones, according to Tungusian lore, i.e. the head and eight bones for the extremities. If they show flaws, the novice cannot become a shaman, but may well remain a lunatic. If bones are missing, which happened rather often, for each missing bone a relation of the new shaman was expected to die. Up to nine people may die in order that a new shaman comes to be, and indeed there were candidates who refused to accept the shamanic vocation when they learned how many bones they lacked. A common Jakuti myth claims that the relations who die during the making of a shaman become stakes in a weir which spans the river of disease and death. This weir protects the shaman, and the community, from unfriendly spirits and the attacks that come from other shamans. The greatest of all shamans, so the Jakuti believed, suffered dismemberment three times in their lives, with all the unpleasant side-effects it involves.

Now, if you think that 'becoming a shaman' must be unpleasant if it kills a lot of relations, it is even worse when nobody dares to accept the vocation. In such cases, the spirits were known to become wrathful and to slay people to release their rage, until finally some person shows the characteristic period of insanity and comes to accept the shaman's role. This sort of 'spiritual activity' may seem a bit strange to modern people. Let us remember that the spirits of Siberian shamanism reflect the harsh realities of life in an almost inhospitable country. Where the spirits have the power to heal they also have the power to kill. The very spirits who assisted a healing ceremony were known to be responsible for the disease. Thus, a shaman was a feared person, a dangerous being closely allied with the worst entities in Siberian folk-belief. Many shamans were dreaded by their communities. Some of them chose to wear iron masks before their eyes, as they believed that their gaze might harm others. The observant reader may have noticed that I have used the past tense to describe Siberian shamanism, though I hope that some of the tradition remains. Starting with the Stalinist era, shamans had to give their drums to the local village soviet. In some cases, this amounted

28 The Sacred Disease

to a death penalty, as several traditions believed that the shaman has the same life-expectation as the drum. This fatal belief came from the identification of the ritual drum with the 'mother-soul' or the helping spirit of the shaman. Other shamans were simply shot or sent to prison camps, where death came slowly but quite as certainly. This persecution stemmed from the Communist antagonism to all religion. Shamans were thought to exploit their community, to scare people with superstitions and to make trouble for the government. Soviet scholars were extremely shy about the topic, especially in admitting that some forms of shamanism go back to the stone ages. Some leading communist philosophers had declared that religion was invented by 'the ruling class'. It was their belief that, during the stone ages, the 'ruling class' did not exist, and consequently religion, or shamanism, could not have existed either. A lot of soviet scholars proposed that stone-age shamanism never existed, and wrote hilarious texts explaining the numerous half-human, half-bestial shaman figures found in Palaeolithic art as extremely badly drawn people, or more likely, deformed cripples. No doubt this attitude is changing, now the USSR is no more, but for the shamans of Siberia, it may be too late.

Shaking and trembling, as a part of voodoo possession rites, was well documented by Maya Deren and Milo Rigaud, whose work is highly recommended. The phenomenon is commonly found in the polytheistic religions of Africa, from where it spread, via the slave trade, to the West Indies, the southern United States and parts of Meso-America. In voodoo, possession by deities is part of ordinary religious activity. During the ceremony, the 'loah' (voodoo considers its 'deities' as 'principles' or 'laws') are called forth from the invisible realm. The drums thunder, flames flicker and sweat glistens on the faces of the dancers. Each loah has particular rhythms, songs, sacrificial offerings and vevers, i.e. large symbols drawn in Hour on the soil of the ritual space. These blend to excite the senses and to send out a call, and the loah respond by entering the body of a dancer (or several). Dizziness, shaking, stumbling and intense yawning are all characteristic signs that a loah is present who will soon 'mount' (obsess) the devotee. At some

point, the dancer loses consciousness and would collapse, were it not for the presence of the loa who swiftly enters the worshipper and moves the dancer from within. The other participants soon recognise the loa who has entered the dancer, and provide it with a number of divine attributes. Ghuede, lord of death and lust and crazy jokes, lends to put on sunglasses and a very superior smile. Leghba, ancient lord of the cross-roads, requires a cane to lean on. Erzulie, lady of love and sympathy, expects to be clad in beautiful garments, and insists on make-up and perfume. Ogoun, god of the warriors, calls for a uniform and a sword. Being properly equipped, the loa proceed to participate in the worship. They accept the offerings, demonstrate their super-human powers, and listen to the requests of worshippers. Occasionally they give advice, perform a healing or bless a lottery ticket, It is an interesting point that the loa tend to choose their 'horses' among the crowd of dancing worshippers. It rarely happens that a priest or a drummer is 'mounted', and for good reasons, as these participants have to keep the ceremony under control. A good many devotees of voodoo know that they are regularly mounted by a loa. It is the loa who chose the worshipper they would like to in-dwell, but unlike, say, Siberian shamanism, the devotee does not suffer a near-fatal disease or form of insanity.

Voodoo devotees generally know which loa enjoys to obsess them, but claim amnesia of the actual event. They insist that they cannot remember what it was like to be 'ridden' by the loa, let alone all the wild things they did when they were inspired. This has led some scholars to claim that a characteristic element of obsession-trances is the total black-out of the human personality. Similar tales were told in the early days of hypnotherapy, when it was believed that amnesia is an essential part of trance and healing. When I was first hypnotised I remember coming out of the trance with a great sense of disappointment. 'It didn't work' I thought, 'I can remember the whole thing!' So much for expectations and beliefs. Amnesia can occur, and does occur, when the deep mind (or the loa if you like) wishes to keep certain events and information from the conscious self. Likewise, a strong ego has to be

30 The Sacred Disease

suspended, before a new sentience, such as a god or spirit, may appear. I remember trance workings with friends, which involved amnesia in regard to certain personality changes. My friends knew that something was happening. They also knew that their deep minds were doing them a favour by keeping certain information outside of their remembrance. Of course, I respected this decision of their deep minds, and kept my mouth shut. A few days later, the personality-changes had occurred, and all of a sudden my friends remembered what had happened. Amnesia can be seen as a convenience. Some people find it easier to function in their normal human roles when they are not aware of what happens during obsession, and consequently they do not remember. In voodoo, devotees are expected to forget what they did when they were obsessed, this belief is shared by most of their society, and consequently, people live up to it.

In this place it may be valuable to consider the influence of epilepsy on shamanism. The early researchers of shamanic practise were swift in their verdict that shamans are people suffering from severe mental and physical disorders. Early studies abound with references to excitable, half-witted lunatics who had mysteriously turned their insanity into a trade and exploited the people of their society by playing on their fears and superstitions. Quite a few shamans were classed as epileptics by scholars who failed to recognise the difference between an involuntary epileptic fit and the willed, enthusiastic shaking of the shamans. E.O. James, for instance, declared that shamans are neurotic persons whose pathological behaviour begins with childhood. Siberian shamans, who were the first to come to the attention of European scholars, were considered 'excitable', 'half-crazy' and even 'deviant'. Another popular explanation claimed that shamans are actually schizophrenics who had managed to cure themselves to some extent, which is more than can be said for most anthropologists. Then there is the noteworthy 'arctic hysteria' theory, which boils down to the insight that in far-away places, people tend to be a bit beside themselves. It took a while before scholars came to comprehend that, crazy or not, shamanism seems to work. Very reluctantly, shamanism was interpreted as a form of psycho-

therapy. The shaking and trembling which characterised so many trances was called 'pseudo-epilepsy', which sounds scientific but doesn't amount to very much.

Before we come to consider 'pseudo-epilepsy', I would like to refer to the phenomenon of epilepsy itself. According to Professor Delank (1981), epilepsy is a rather complicated phenomenon. Delank indicates that we ought to make a distinction between chronic epilepsy, which is a disease, and the ability to have an epileptic fit, which is rather normal. He points out that the capacity to have such a fit exists in every human brain, and claims that such a fit is but a symptom, not a disease in itself. According to his textbook on neurology, such fits are a rather common phenomenon which is experienced by about 5% of the population at one time or another. The chronic form of epilepsy, however, comes in a lot of variations. Best known is probably the classic 'grand mal' which may involve a lot of highly unpleasant experiences. People who suffer from this sort of affliction tend to collapse and lose consciousness. They may fall badly (which gave the name 'the falling disease' to epilepsy) and twitch on the ground in uncontrollable spasms. They may lose control over their bladder, foam from the mouth and are in danger of suffocation by swallowing their tongues. While the fit lasts, they are in danger of hurting themselves, and have to be looked after, but luckily, such fits are generally over in less than a minute.

Quite obviously, this sort of behaviour is a far cry from the 'fits' cultivated by shamans. However, there is a variety of epilepsy which Professor Delank called 'psychogenic'. These fits, we learn, involve a degree of control. For a start, they are not as brutal as the classic 'grand mal'. The patient may collapse, but will do so in a way that prevents him from hurting himself. There is no danger of suffocation. The foaming mouth, the loss of bladder control and the unmoving eyes are all absent, and the fit has, as Delank notes, a 'demonstrative character'. It can last much longer than the real thing. Such psychogenic fits need no malfunction of the brain as a cause, they seem to belong to the field of psychosomatic diseases. It seems that the people who have them have learned to produce them.

32 The Sacred Disease

In the days of antiquity, people called epilepsy 'the sacred disease' as the people suffering from it were thought to be inspired, or at least distinguished, by some supernatural agency. Several famous figures of antiquity were known to suffer from epileptic fits, such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Mohammed. It remains an open question whether these individuals suffered from the chronic disease, or had an excitable temperament and experienced the 'psychogenic' variety. All three of them were exceedingly interested in spiritual matters, which did not stop them from causing a good deal of unnecessary slaughter. Alexander, for instance, criticised his old teacher Aristotle for publishing the secrets of the metaphysical. Caesar was interested in the Egyptian mystery religion and held a number of priestly offices, and Mohammed received teachings from the angel Gabriel. In classic shamanic fashion he travelled through the spirit worlds and returned with visions that led to the foundation of Islam. We cannot be sure if these people enjoyed shamanic shaking or suffered from chronic epilepsy, but we can be certain that all three used their bizarre behaviour to impress their contemporaries.

Not all classical authors saw epilepsy as especially sacred. There is nothing especially sacred about a person who suffers a 'grand mal', nor do the people who experience it seem especially inspired or blessed by the event. Hippocrates was among the first to utter doubts about the sacredness of epilepsy. He stated that the disease is as un-sacred as any other disease, and pointed out that people like to call things 'sacred' which they do not understand.

... If they would call everything they do not understand 'sacred', there would be no end to sacredness.

The Greek healer Galen proposed that epilepsy does not come from the gods but is due to a stagnation of the humours, such as phlegm and black gall. A common belief of his age claimed that the disease was influenced by the moon, the idea being that epilepsy comes from the brain, which, as a 'cold organ' is ruled by the moon, and blood, animal or human and preferably fresh, was drunk as a remedy. In the *Natural*

History of Pliny the Elder you can find reference to this custom. Much to the disgust of Pliny, there were apparently some wealthy people in Rome who indulged in this form of vampirism to the point of killing their victims.

The black gall fluid was thought to be related to the melancholic temperament. Aristotle himself claimed that most prophets and seers were of such a disposition, and characterised by long periods of deep brooding which were occasionally interrupted by sudden outbursts of ecstatic insight. This theory remained popular for a long time. Agrippa of Nettesheim (1510) likewise related the black gall humour to the melancholic temperament and the onset of insanity. He wrote (I, 60) that according to the teachings of the physicians black gall invites evil spirits to enter and obsess a patient. The white gall, by contrast, was thought to feed the fire of enthusiasm. So, he claims that the falling disease, and fainting, may lead to inspiration and the certain knowledge of the future.

Paracelsus, around 1534, explained epilepsy with confusing analogies. In each element, he proposed, lie the three qualities symbolised by salt (the firm), sulphur (the energetic) and mercury (the changeable). In his cosmology, the fire element belongs to heaven. When the three qualities of fire have conglomerated 'like a fruit', when ripe the shell bursts and thunder is born. Likewise, the three qualities of the earth element come to compose an egg. When the egg is ripe, its shell shatters, and another sort of thunder, called 'earthquake' is born. These phenomena can be observed in nature, though their cause, the 'fruit' and the 'egg' seems to exist only on the astral plane. These cannot be seen, but they are nevertheless responsible for epileptic fits.

Know then why God punishes us with such disease is because man is the small world and what exists in the great world, he has to have with - and in himself.

I would like to add that the metaphor of the bursting egg or fruit has a close parallel in the research of Wilhelm Reich. People in Reichian therapy may find themselves trembling and shaking as soon as their

34 The Sacred Disease

chronic muscular tension ('the armour') relaxes and the life energies flow freely.

It seems obvious that during the middle ages, and quite a while afterwards, people did not know the difference between the epileptic disease and the shaking experienced by inspired seers. Wolf (1989) mentions the case of a young woman who was burned as a witch in 1651. Her sole evil lay in epileptic fits, and for this sin she was tortured by well-meaning churchmen. When she had a fit during the torture, this was taken as a sign of the Devil, and she was made to confess. First she 'confessed' that she set light to her own house, which did not satisfy the authorities. After further torture, she claimed having met a 'black man' on the roof, with whom she had made a pact. This admission was enough to seal her death.

The idea that epileptic fits may be caused by demons, devils or the evil eye is an old one. An epileptic fit was seen as a bad omen. In ancient Rome, the public assembly had to adjourn when such a fit occurred. As a cure against the disease, Pliny the Elder reported that people drove an iron nail into the soil where the sick one had fallen, possibly to nail the offensive demon to the spot. The fact that occasionally sacrificial offerings were placed on such locations makes it likely that people thought they had to placate the bound demon. The notion that epilepsy was an infectious disease which can be caught when touching a sufferer was fashionable in Pliny's time, and continued, like the 'demonic possession' hypothesis, well into the 18th Century. If we can trust the historical evidence, it seems that epilepsy was far more common in the middle ages than today. As a guess, I would like to propose that a good many cases of 'epilepsy' and 'demonic possession' can be traced to ergotamine poisoning. This phenomenon, also known as 'St Anthony's Fire', comes from a fungus (*Claviceps Purpurea*) which occasionally grows on rye. If ergot is inadvertently baked into bread, mass-poisoning can result. Ergotamine is chemically close to LSD, but a good deal more dangerous. Typical effects are cramps, shaking, convulsions, coupled with extreme hallucinations leading to delirium. This sort of thing can continue for days and lead to the loss of limbs or even death.

Cases are known when whole villages behaved in this fashion. Of course the common opinion held demons to be responsible. It is an interesting question if the Salem witch-hunt may have been triggered by ergotamine poisoning on a large scale.

Epilepsy was also confused with the onset of rabies, and Pliny mentions that both afflictions were often treated with the same remedies. When it comes to cures, there are few diseases which have caused so many strange therapies. Blood drinking, which was supposed to cool the brain, survived almost to our century, though with the passage of time the emphasis shifted so that the blood of animals, or one's own blood, was preferred to direct vampirism of humans. Other cures involved sacrificial offerings, exorcisms, purification, incense burning, beating with willow rods, burning one's clothes, sleeping in the church under the altar, bathing after sunset, fasting, prayer and confession, plus some magical methods, such as knotting the disease into cord or cloth, or transferring it to a tree. Talismans were extremely popular. Coffin nails made anti-epileptic rings and wearing a red cloth could be a substitute to blood drinking. In 1801, the Hamburgian Dr Rambach wrote that thieves who had found their end at the gallows were completely plundered for the bits and pieces that could be sold as remedies for the falling disease. Such medicine could be made out of bone, flesh, teeth, fingernails, hair, skull, brain, heart, liver, gall, urine, the famous 'thieves hand' and some substances found rarely and only among female thieves, such as the placenta and milk. Such medicine poses the question if epilepsy is not preferable to the therapy.

Animal magnetism

In 1734, Franz-Anton Mesmer was born in the village of Iznang near Konstanz. Showing unusual talent, he was sent to Vienna where he studied and practiced medicine. Now Mesmer's name is closely associated with the phenomena of magnetism. He and his colleagues

36 The Sacred Disease

noticed certain effects when magnets were passed over the body of a patient. Depending on the direction of the passes and their mode of application, some of the patients reported changes in their awareness. Some passes seemed to induce drowsiness and lethargy, while others seemed to stimulate and tonify. Energy shudders were experienced, and occasionally the magnetised patients began to tremble and shake. Such effects were attributed to the influence of the magnet on the human body. It would go too far to explore the entire history of magnetism on these pages. Suffice it to say that magnetism became an important field of medical research.

In 1773 Mesmer directed a clinic devoted to the application of magnetism. By 1776 his attitude concerning magnetism had changed drastically. Mesmer had realised that magnets were not required. Using his hands, breath and willpower, Mesmer found that he could produce all effects which had previously been ascribed to the magnets. This led him to propose the existence of an 'animal magnetism' and that animals function as living magnets, and to identify magnetism with the life-force itself. These revolutionary concepts upset a lot of his colleagues. The ensuing fight with the Medical Faculty was enough to make Mesmer pack his bags and move to a kinder climate.

In 1778 he arrived in Paris. A wise choice, as Paris was probably the most open-minded city of his time when it came to new theories and bizarre inventions. Moving into spacious quarters near the Place Vendome, Mesmer set up his equipment and pronounced his theories. It is not easy to understand these theories in our day and age, as Mesmer did not write much and spoke the sort of French that made the Parisians prefer to listen to someone else. It seems that he proposed a certain 'fluidum', an invisible, all-including energy. This energy, named 'animal magnetism' was the true origin of such phenomena as electricity, magnetism, gravity and indeed, life itself. The human body was seen as a natural magnet comparable to the earth. This made the head the 'north pole' of the body, the realm that received the influence from the stars, while the feet, as 'south pole', received the magnetism of the earth below. An energy flow was thought to exist between the two poles.

Mesmer believed that health came from harmony, and that disease occurs wherever the energy flow was hindered, distorted or blocked. The body was thought to contain a number of 'little magnets'. These could be influenced by magnetic passes, which in turn was meant to harmonise the energy flow. This process, however, involved what Mesmer called 'the healing crisis'. While the flow was regulated, the patients had a tendency to twitch, shudder, shake, or more dramatically, roll around on the floor in convulsions.

In practice, Mesmer employed several methods. Magnetic passes, from person to person, was the most simple one. The good doctor taught this method to about 100 disciples (always with the proviso that he would keep the 'essential secret' to himself) and these were soon out and about doing the good work. Animal magnetism became the fashion of the day, especially as there was a titillating element to the cures it worked.

For instance, magnetic passes required a degree of intimacy. The 'magnetiseur' did not actually touch the patient, but made the passes close to the body. On the other hand, patient and therapist sat very close together. To produce the 'magnetic rapport', the healer used to clamp his knees around those of the patient. More daring still, most of the magnetic passes had to be made near the 'equator' of the body, which set a lot of tongues wagging. Another method invented by Mesmer made use of an oaken box named the 'Baquet'. A baquet was a big affair. It had a diameter of approximately two metres and a height of 50cm. The box was round (like a hat box) so that people could sit around it in a circle. Inside the mysterious box was an arrangement of bottles and iron filings. The bottles contained water which Mesmer had magnetised (or so he said). Now the baquet had holes in its top and through these a number of iron rods emerged. The rods had joints, they were highly mobile and they could easily be attached to the body. The patients sat in a circle around the baquet. They attached the rods to the afflicted parts of their anatomy. Then they reached out and formed a circle (or a 'magnetic chain') by holding hands, while Mesmer's aides tied a cord loosely around the patients, which was meant to strengthen



the magnetic flow. It did not take long for the baquet to exert its wondrous influence. The patients reported that they could feel energy flowing. They giggled, trembled, jerked, and one after the other, gave way to highly dramatic fits. If we can trust the records, the magnetised patients began to tremble and shake. They had convulsions and cramps, they wept, screamed, howled and laughed. Those who lost control over themselves were politely carried to the 'crisis room', also named 'hell of convulsions', which had heavily padded walls and floor. There the patients were free to enjoy catharsis at leisure, and by all accounts, they did.

It seems that Mesmer believed that the 'healing crisis' was required to clear up and harmonise the energy flow. The nature of the crisis, however, depended on the patient. Most patients trembled, some experienced states of high excitement and hilarity while others found themselves brutally tossed about by convulsions. Some patients even gave way to 'indecent exposure' and outrageous behaviour (such as hugging) - one more reason to criticise the Mesmerian movement for its 'lack of morals'! After the healing crisis, the patients generally calmed down and fell asleep. Recovering from this 'healing sleep', many claimed that their afflictions had disappeared.

Mesmer's methods, however, were not as unusual as we might assume today. In the 1780s, all Paris was excited about the advance of science. As Robert Dalton (1968) points out in such detail, there was a climate, an atmosphere of excitement and progress. Newton's ideas were not universally accepted and a lot of scientist/philosophers proposed different theories. Dozens of scholars claimed to have found the 'universal agents', the 'invisible fluidum', the 'ultimate energy' or the 'ether' itself. Some hailed electricity as the 'heal-all', and the wealthy had electrification machines at home, which could be used for amusing experiments. Mesmer's 'magnetic chain' is not very far from the set-up used to demonstrate how electricity can be led through a group of people, an experiment which was familiar to most members of the nobility. It was a time of wild, unprovable theories. For every crazy idea that Mesmer proposed, there were half a dozen crazier ones

40 The Sacred Disease

pronounced by the leading lights of scientific thought. What makes Mesmer so different is that he actually got effects. Within a few years, magnetism became a popular fashion. Mesmer founded a society for magnetic research which was based on humanitarian principles, such as the equality of all members, no matter the rank and title (provided they could pay the exceptionally high membership fees) and places at the baquets had to be booked weeks in advance. Every second day a baquet for the poor was placed out of doors, and if this was not enough, Mesmer magnetised a tree or two and the poor made do with that.

The 'humanitarian' character of his society is rather similar to the notions expressed by Freemasonry, and indeed, there are further parallels. Mesmer was very concerned with atmospheres. In his 'salon' a certain twilight was cultivated. There were heavy wall-hangings, many of them with mysterious astrological symbols, and mirrors were used for unusual light effects. In some rooms, musicians played soothing tunes, basically on wind instruments, the pianoforte, the glass-harp and the glass-harmonica. The glass instruments are based on the principle of rubbing a wet finger on the rim of a wine glass. The glass harp consisted of a set of such glasses, tuned by a bit of water inside, and the glass harmonica was Benjamin Franklin's improvement on the former instrument. No doubt these instruments had similar effects as the 'singing bowls' played in the Himalayan mountains. Mesmer's old friend Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote several pieces of music for the glass instruments, which were played in Mesmer's salon. After the decline of the Mesmerian movement the scientific establishment was swift to declare that such sounds were bad for mental health, and the glass instruments fell into disuse for almost two centuries.

To suit the atmosphere, Mesmer himself used to wear violet robes at the healings. Occasionally he made use of a metal rod, which he wielded like a magician's wand when making passes on the wealthier clients. This setting no doubt worked its effects on the minds of all. It seems that some of Mesmer's patients encountered 'extra-sensory perceptions' (to use the modern name) between the healing crisis and sleep. Several cases of premonitions, dreaming-true, thought-transfer-

ence and meetings with dead relations seem to have occurred.

Things got even livelier in the research of Amand-Marie-Jacques de Chastenet, Marquis de Puységur (1751-1825). The Marquis and his brother were disciples of Mesmer. When magnetising a shepherd's boy they found their subject entranced in a state they named 'somnambulistic magnetism'. While seeming to sleep, the lad could walk around, respond to questions and perform simple tasks. More so, he seemed to be in an altered consciousness at the time. As the brothers De Puységur proceeded to induce states of somnambulistic magnetism, they encountered fantastic phenomena. In trance, some of their patients claimed that they could see into their bodies. Others could diagnose their own disease, prescribe their own medicine and name the specific day when they would recover.

In 1784 the Marquis informed Mesmer of these researches, emphasising the use of verbal communication and suggestion to induce healings. Mesmer had other problems and was not amused. To him, the healing crisis was the element which restored health and harmony. The 'artificial somnambulism' seemed of little interest. To the Marquis, on the other hand, the crisis was just the beginning of the treatment. It seems that Mesmer felt uneasy about such notions. He saw the body as something real and reliable, while the mind was a questionable influence, subject to imagination and delusion (Chertok, 1978). Also, by 1784, a lot of pressure had come to bear on the magnetic movement. Mesmer had become a dangerous person, as he knew far too much of the secret life of the aristocracy, and some of his followers were busy preparing for the French Revolution (1789). By 1785 Mesmer had to leave France in great haste, leaving behind a magnetic movement which had split into hostile factions. Within a year, the great public ceased to be interested in magnetism, and a fashion that had shaken France for seven years faded into oblivion. Mesmer was called a charlatan by authorities who had refused to try his methods and examine his results. The Marquis of Puységur continued with his researches. For him, the term 'magnetism' was a convenience, a word without substance. Much closer to his interest came the words 'will' and 'belief'.

42 The Sacred Disease

On his estate in Buzancy the Marquis practiced public healing ceremonies. Central to these was a great and aged elm. Before the ceremony, attendants tied ropes to the vast branches of the elm. When all patients had assembled (and there were many of them, as the healings were free-of-charge and open to all callers) the Marquis had them arranged in a circle around the tree. The ropes were bound to the afflicted parts of the body, thereby connecting them with the elm. Next, the patients were instructed to form a magnetic chain by holding hands. In a clear voice, the Marquis gave (suggestive) instructions. The patients were told to feel the magnet current passing from hand to hand, to sense the healing energies as they radiated through each person in the circle. Soon the first patients began to sway, to experience (or to make up) the first effects of the current. Now the Marquis advanced to the trunk of the elm and began to make magnetic passes on the tree itself. Such passes, he declared, would make the tree send out its healing fluidum, and indeed, soon enough the patients showed the very convulsions, shudders and fits that happened so often at the baquets.

When the Marquis saw that a patient was ready, his attendants carefully helped the patient out of the circle, taking care to re-form the magnetic chain immediately. Usually such patients continued with their fits, shaking and rolling over the ground until the Marquis approached them and soothed them with magnetic passes and suggestions. Telling them to calm down, to relax, to close the eyes and to start sleeping, the somnambulistic trance was induced. These suggestions were pretty direct and rather crude, when compared to the artistic achievements of Milton H. Erikson. On the other hand, the Marquis was an aristocrat, and people were used to obeying in those days. The suggestions, though simple, seem to have worked well enough. When a patient reached the 'somnambulistic stage' the Marquis began to ask questions. What did the patient sense? What experience was strongest? What was the hidden meaning of a disease? (and just which questions would you care to ask?) In their trances, the patients replied with better knowledge than in their ordinary consciousness. Soon the Marquis discovered just what each person was repressing and, using sugges-

tions, proposed ways of healing. It turned out that the patients, in their trance state, were ready to change their beliefs and attitudes to suit the healing. They responded to healing suggestions with such ease that the Marquis gained the reputation of a miracle-worker. Thus, the Marquis de Puysegur invented hypnotherapy in the last years before the French Revolution and practiced it with a degree of efficacy which few modern therapists can equal.

4 The Num and the Kia

One of the most fascinating examples of contemporary trances comes from the San culture of southern Africa. The San are a group of nomadic tribes (or family groups) living near and within the Kalahari Desert. San and !Kung (the !K is a click sound uncommon in European tongues) are commonly called 'bushmen' in our enlightened age, a derisive term used with equal disregard by black and white Africans, who have done much to destroy the hunter-gatherer society of their nomadic neighbours.

The culture of the San is one of the most unusual on this planet. According to anthropological studies, the San are a race of their own which has little to do with the other inhabitants of Africa. In former days, the ancestors of the San and !Kung roamed throughout Africa. Today, the few remaining groups have been driven into the most inhospitable wastelands of the desert. The San live in small groups that move across the country on travel lines they have used for many generations. Several groups may move in the same territory without interference as they use similar routes and camping sites at different times of the year. San society consists of small nomadic groups that journey on their own. Occasionally some groups meet at a common site, to feast, to chat and to trade with each other. Their society is non-hierarchical, so there are neither rulers, leaders or a priesthood. What makes the San so fascinating for our study is their seething trance practise. Though survival in the Kalahari is so difficult that few Africans would bother to try it, the San manage it on an average of five hours

work a day. This gives them plenty of time to enjoy themselves. The San like to visit each other, to tell stories and make music. A 'giraffe dance' may take place several times a month. This healing ritual is usually performed at night, when the air is cool and the stars shine clearly. Few healers dare to seethe by daytime when the burning heat of the sun lies on the desert. In a giraffe dance, most of the women sit around a central fire. They sing and chant, and clap their hands, while the dance takes place around them. The dancers, most of them men but including several women-healers, hold themselves erect. Their knees are slightly bent. The feet are lifted a little, and set down with a firm stomp, so that each step moves them but a few inches. They circle the fire very slowly. Young dancers sometimes practise leaps and elaborate steps, basically to have fun and show off. The experienced healers shuffle along slowly, and with little concern for the audience. As the dance continues, the heat increases. Heat is a basic ingredient of this rite. The fire in the centre, the fire of the singing and the fire of *Num* all blend to work this magick. 'Num' is a San word describing what we might call 'transcendental energy'. Like the sun, and like their 'great god', Num is a 'death-thing' to the San, meaning that they treat it with great respect. To the San, Num is the power behind all magic and healing. Without Num, ritual or spiritual activity are thought impossible. Num, they say, was given to them by the gods. Num has a physical abode, in the human body it is usually found at the base of the spine, the hips, the belly and the flanks. When a healer dances and sweats the Num awakens and makes the healer tremble and shake. As the body vibrates and shudders, the Num heats up, churns around and finally turns to steam. This steam, the San say, rises upwards until it enters the head, and a consciousness called 'Kia' sets in. It is probably just one of those coincidences that the San 'Kia'-state closely resembles what Austin Spare independently described as 'Kia', or 'the atmospheric self'.

Richard Katz, in his brilliant study *Boiling Energy: Community Healing Among the Kalahari !Kung* (1982) gives a detailed account of San trance dances. I'll give a brief synopsis, in the hope that you'll go out and get the book. What is it like to dance the Num?

46 Num and the Kia

The old healer Kinachau says that after dancing, dancing and more dancing the Num lifts him up in belly and back and makes him shake violently. The Num makes him tremble, it is so hot. 'Fast and shallow breathing' he says, makes the Num rise. As he dances and shakes, the Num saturates all of his body, and when it rises to fill the head, he finds himself staring intensely, seeing and recognising the diseases of others. Other San healers say that Num lids them to heaven or makes them burst like ripe seed-pods. It is no mean feat to ride the force of the Num. The Num is divine as it can heal and enlighten, but it is also dangerous. To many San, the Num seems so painful that they prefer to avoid it. Other claim that it feels as if thorns were stuck in their 'gebesi'. This San term describes the lower belly and the Hanks. San healers say that people with a soil gebesi find it much easier to shake than those with a hard gebesi. Good shaking requires a soil belly and flexible hips - an idea that comes close to Wilhelm Reich's thesis that orgasm and natural pulsation occur most easily in a body free of muscular cramp or 'armour'. The healer Dau told R. Katz that you can recognise a person who fears Num by the pain in his belly. When he, Dau, feels such pain, he simply sits down for a while, relaxing and massaging his gebesi, and this soothes and cools the Num until he can get up and continue with the dance. A giraffe dance can keep the group busy all night through, and this is only possible as the dancers, healers, singers and observers take turns. The ceremony is a serious one, as it involves the contacting of gods and spirits, and the healing of the sick. Maybe it is this subtle drama that lends so much humour to the ritual. The healing is serious business, all the more reason to make jokes about it.

Attaining the Kia-awareness can be overwhelming. Some healers state that the Num makes them 'outfold', and that in Kia they are more fully themselves than in daily life. According to Kinachau, a 'beginning Kia' involves plenty of heat and sweating, and legs that feel like rubber as you stumble or float around. It is characterised by confusion, unclear thinking and occasional fear. To some healers fear, and specifically fear of death, is a constant companion on the way to Kia-awareness. Going into Kia is often compared with dying, and to the San, the dying that

precedes Kia is not a metaphorical but a real death. An outsider could argue that the healers tend to survive their Kia-trances, and that some !Kung healers start in their 20s and do their regular four dances a month until they are 70 or older, which sounds like a pleasant road to ripe old age. To the San, these healers die every time they experience Kia, and they die a real death. It is a sign of the healer's power that they survive this real death and revive themselves in each dance ceremony. 'Dying' can involve the sensation of bursting apart or being shattered, apart from the fact that 'in Kia, thoughts die'.

When Kia sets in, the consciousness of the healer changes, and numerous operations become possible. The experienced dancer may learn to see and heal diseases. In San belief, a disease can be caused by a variety of unfriendly entities, among them various spirits, ancestors, or the 'smaller god'. These shoot darts into people, 'death-things' such as arrows, thorns, bits of metal, which cause the disease. A healer in Kia awareness can see and pull the death-things out. For this act, the healer grabs the patient, and pulls the dart out. In this action, the disease goes out of the patient and into the hand of the healer, who gives a scream and hurls it away. As the healer is usually in a pretty emotional state at the time, part of the healing may be a dispute with the entity that caused the disease. In Kia-consciousness, a healer may address the gods and spirits politely one moment, cajoling the next, and continue with threats and insults asking how they dare to try to take a life. On behalf of a patient, a San healer is quite capable of shouting abuse at the gods. Another part of the treatment consists of rubbing the patient with the healer's sweat, which is known to contain plenty of Num.

When a disease dart is extracted, the healer, shaking intensely, utters loud howling screams. Some claim that the screams describe the pain of the healer as s/he flicks the disease out of the hands and into the night. Others claim that the disease is scared by the scream, and flees. Whatever explanation it may be, we can be sure that the scream gives a lot of emphasis to the ritual act. The patient gets a clear signal that things are different now, while the healer may find it easier to dissociate the disease dart and throw it away. When shamanism involves role

48 Num and the Kia

playing and dramatic gestures, it is usually done for the benefit of the patient, audience and healers alike. Pulling an invisible dart out and throwing it away with a scream is much more convincing than saying 'Well, it's gone now. You're healed. I did it on the astral.'

In San ritual dances, lots of people are healed, and not all of them were aware that they had diseases sticking in their flesh. Some patients are treated by several healers during a single night, all of whom enthusiastically find and extract 'death-things'. Perceiving the disease darts seems to be a highly subjective skill. As R. Katz reports, healers frequently disagree with each other when it comes to localising the afflictions. Quite a few of them state that all other healers are blind amateurs, who pull in places where obviously no darts are sticking and ignore the very locations that are full of them. Though the healers often depend on each other, few of them are ready to say something kind about the healing skills of others.

Healing is one of the essential applications of Num-energy and Kia-consciousness. Some San state that the Num is weak when the dance is too light and there are few sick persons around. Others take a different attitude, and enjoy Num and Kia for their own sake. Not all San who experience Kia put it to use for healing. Healers are also capable of healing themselves. When there is no group dance available, they sing the old songs for themselves, shake, go into Kia-consciousness, and pull out their own disease-darts. Kia-awareness can have a lot of interesting uses. When a healer attains an intense Kia, s/he dies. Sometimes this may mean that the healer collapses. Lying prone on the ground, shaking or still like a corpse, and covered with sweat, the healer may leave the body, or forget it, and project consciousness elsewhere. The other participants of the ceremony recognise that the soul has gone travelling, and sing stronger so the soul is protected, and can find its way back more easily. Having flown out of his skull, old K"xau reports:

Then my protector told me that I would enter the earth. That I would travel far through the earth and emerge at another place. When we emerged, we began to climb the thread - it was the thread of the sky!

Yes, my friend. Now up there in the sky, the people up there, the spirits, the dead people up there, they sing for me so I can dance ...

It is an interesting detail that old K"xau reports shape shifting from his journeys through the otherworlds. In !Kung belief, dead people go to God.

When you go to where God is, you are mamba. That's how you go to him. Because if you do that, he'll let you live. If you go to Him like a regular person, you'll die ... you won't come back. When you've gone back there, you have died and aren't going to come back. But if you're a snake, friend, you'll stay alive, (quoted from *Shamanic Voices*, Joan Halifax).

Kia consciousness liberates healers to travel through spirit-worlds. It can also be used to travel in this world. Some San healers are said to be able to project their consciousness into lions and wild animals. If a lion behaves suspiciously, that lion is possessed by the travelling soul of a Kia-dancer. As in European mythology, the San say that if you wound a lion that houses a human guest, that sorcerer will be found wounded as soon as s/he comes out of trance. Another application of Kia is oracular. Occasionally, a Kia-dancer will receive visions of future events, discover where game is hiding, or inform the group what beasts are prowling round the camp. These faculties require strict training and practice. A person may 'have Num' but this doesn't specify how well the power is handled. Inexperienced dancers may be afraid of the Num, or overwhelmed by its sudden outbursts. Persons who wish to refine their Num generally seek out a competent healer, who puts them on a strict ritual diet. Most of the 'lessons' take place during the public healing dances. In San belief, teachers can 'own' and 'give' Num to other persons, which is generally done by shooting Num-energy darts into them. Apart from the popular 'giraffe dance' the San have some more specialised dance rituals. One of them is the 'drum dance', involving one drummer (usually an old man) and most of the women of the community. These arrange themselves in a horseshoe formation

50 Num and the Kia

around the drum, which they accompany with singing and hand-clapping. Soon they begin to shudder and shake in a consciousness which they call 'Tara' (lightning flash), which has them shivering and quaking to the rhythm. Unlike the 'giraffe dance', the 'drum dance' can involve healing, but doesn't have to.

Now for some statistics. According to R. Katz, about a third of the women who participate in a drum dance enter Kia awareness. His researches indicate that in San society, of all who search for Num, about 75% of the men and almost all women experience a light Kia. Of these, about 75% of the men but only 25% of the women persist in cultivating Num and become healers. The others give in, mainly as they fear the Kia-death and dread the 'loss of control'. Apart from children, all ages in San society participate in Kia-healing. The Num of old people is considered 'more refined' than the wild Num of young people, who lack the experience to ride the shaking fit. Among the women, the older ladies are usually more attracted to Num than the younger. Perhaps due to San proscription of the Num dance during pregnancy. Many San women discover Num early, then refrain from putting it to use until they are too old to have children.

In the communal giraffe dances, about a quarter of the singers and two thirds of the dancers participate as healers. Not all healers are in Kia at the same time and not all dancers dance at once; the singers take turns and the full ritual can continue until sunrise. San-healing allows the healers to pause and rest whenever they feel like it. In San groups, healers are so common that there is nothing special about them. Men and women are equally respected as healers, and sought for. Though many of them respect the overwhelming experience of Kia-death, not all live in fear of it. To sum it up, here is a quote from Katz, who quotes Bieseke, who quotes the healer Tinay.

She says it as it is:

'If I were afraid of Num, I wouldn't do it. It suits me.'



5 Horses of the Zar

In ancient times, a sultan of the spirits fell in love with the daughter of the Pharaoh. Through the mouth of a wise priest he asked to marry her, but the Pharaoh did not permit it. Full of rage, the spirit sultan entered the body of his beloved, and made his home within her. Soon the Pharaoh's daughter became very ill. Her face turned pale and her will to live waned. For weeks she just dozed on her bed, weak and sad, in the twilight realm between life and death. Seeing his daughter suffer, the Pharaoh sent for healers, seers and sorcerers. Many wise men came to the court, some with rare elixirs, others with spells and exorcisms, but the spirit sultan was stronger than any of them. From day to day the princess became weaker, from day to day the messengers of the Pharaoh searched the country, until at long last they met an old healer at the very limits of Upper Egypt, her name was Zara. She was the daughter of a priest and a good friend of the spirits. Making great haste, the messengers brought Zara to the court. Here, Zara took the appropriate measures. First, she smoke-bathed the obsessed princess thoroughly. Then she prayed, and asked the spirit-sultan to appear, and to speak with her through the mouth of the princess.

'Welcome', old Zara said to the spirit-sultan. 'What is your wish?' This surprised the spirit-sultan a lot. The last weeks he had heard nothing but curses and exorcisms. After a moment of consideration, he answered: 'I came into the body of this princess as the Pharaoh has refused to let her be my wife. I like it this way, and now, my spirit relations have seen it, they want to come and obsess all the ladies of the

court. But you have come and interfered. You came and asked me what I wish. For you, Zara, only for you will I leave the body of this princess, provided you hold a night-feast in my honour.' 'We will be glad to do so', said Zara, 'what sort of feast do you want?' The spirit-sultan replied: 'set up a table for the sacrifice. Light candles for me. Slaughter animals, chant, play on drums in this style (and he showed her the proper words), and I will leave the princess. She will return to better health than before.'

Thus goes the origin story of the Egyptian Zar-cult, as it was told to E. Littmann by the Shecha Zakiya Bint Muhammad Subhi, slightly expanded. It is a tale not unlike many others known to shamans all over the world.

The Zar-cult is common in Egypt and Nubia, where it is popular in all classes of society. Zar rituals are occasions of festivity and healing. Much as the origin story reveals, the Zar spirits are evoked and asked for their desires. To this day, Zar magic is mainly practised by women. Usually the occasion for a Zar rite arises when some woman becomes seriously sick. If she is a member of the Zar cult already, she will contact the shecha, and find healing during the communal Zar ritual. If she is not a member of the cult, she will send a relation to the shecha, with greetings and a symbolic gift. This is usually a bit of cloth or underwear with a gold coin knotted into it. The shecha is said to put this gift under her pillow, so the spirits may tell her about the new patient in a dream. More so, the spirits will inform her about how costly the healing will be. A good Zar-ritual requires a lot of devotees, who sing the spirit songs, work the ritual and become possessed by spirits. Now there are several distinct schools of Zar, each of them with special customs, spirit-contacts and religious traditions. Common to all of them is the religious frame. Though Zar is probably older than Islam, the ritual is characterised by the familiar Islamic setting. The rituals begin with plenty of prayer and the recitation of the *Koran*. Next, the spirits are called. Each Zar spirit has one or more favourite chants and responds to them by entering and obsessing one of the assembly. As there are lots of spirits in Zar (some say 66, others 88), a moderately complete Zar

54 Horses of the Zar

session can last an entire day. The chants are accompanied by a variety of drums, such as the 'Def' (a big frame drum), the 'Req' (a small tambourine with cymbals) and the 'Tabla', an earthenware drum with a fish-skin head, also known as 'Darabuka' (not to be confused with the Indian tabla). These instruments are usually played by the more experienced ladies, who can control the urge to become possessed.

Klunzinger, 1877, quoted by Littmann, gives the following account:

The Sar is a certain djinn, a mighty demon of disease, who prefers to afflict women... immediately they say: 'Today the Sar is with her, it must be a Saturday, Tuesday or Thursday. A lot of women and girls come to the house of the patient and receive busa, a half-fermented Arabian beer, the favourite drink of the Abyssinians, and ram's intestines. Now they sing and drum and dance the Sar dance. The women, squatting on the floor or seated on crossed legs, sway, just as in a zikr dance, their head and upper torso from side to side. Soon some of them become obsessed and jump around dancing madly... As soon as they and others have become ecstatic, the somnambulist ones are asked what remedies are useful against the disease.

According to various accounts, possession by Zar spirits begins with chanting, music and swaying. When the song of a given spirit is sung, that spirit comes to obsess a couple of the participants. This happens to the patient, who find out which Zar-spirit is obsessing her, but it also happens to other members of the congregation, who have been sick once, and have been enjoying contact with their former disease spirit ever since. Most of the people who practise Zar have been healed by the cult, and found the rituals habit-forming. A patient who has been half-dead a moment before may suddenly get up and dance as the spirit moves her. This dance can mean moving through the room slowly or it can be done sitting. In either case the upper half of the body sways from one side to the other, while head and arms hang loose and relaxed. As the general excitement build up, 'involuntary' ecstatic motions occur. Obsessed people may jump around, twitch, leap, tremble, shake, scream, weep, stumble against walls or collapse on the ground, to lie

shaking or still until other participants drag them to the side, sprinkle them with rose water, and cover them with a white cloth. Klunzinger was surprised to note that after all these antics, the obsessed ladies 'claim to be other people, often saints. And even more so, Sar spirits.' It is the Zar spirits who, speaking through the mouth of the patient, specify which remedies and offerings will heal the disease. These remedies are often sacrificial gifts for the spirits, or talismanic jewellery for the patient, or simply blood. In some Zar rites a ram is consecrated and led around the circle of worshippers. The patient tries to ride on it. After this dedication the ram, which in all accounts seems surprisingly stoic about its fate, is slaughtered. Blood is spilled around, poured over the patient's clothing, and often enough the obsessive spirit has a good drink before agreeing to leave the patient. Sometimes the patient is still under a taboo after the spirit has left, and may not take off her ritual clothes for a week. Quite commonly, the obsessive spirits demand that their favourite songs are sung; what they desire is recognition and a measure of affection. A spirit may agree to leave the body of a patient, and declare that it will return after a year for another bout of disease and another good feast. Then the shecha will barter with the spirit, for more time, a lighter affliction, and the certain promise that the spirit won't come back earlier.

The Zar spirits are a varied lot. The word Zar possibly comes from the Kushitic Bilin language of the Nile valley south of Egypt, from 'Gar' meaning 'heaven' and 'god'. Most authors state that the Zar are not djinns, but come from another class of spirits. The Zar spirits are classed in a strict hierarchy, from spirit-sultans, to spirit-beggars. The Zar spirits include nature spirits, local place spirits, and humanoid spirits of all religions - some of the Zar are Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Pagan or go back to sorcerous traditions. A couple of Zar spirits used to be gods in pre-Islamic days, such as 'Atete', who was a major deity of the Gallo people, or 'Safina' whose archetypal image is that of the undine or mermaid. The Zar spirits can be of either sex. A person obsessed by a Zar spirit will be treated like the spirit. A woman obsessed by a male spirit will be addressed and treated like a man, and a man obsessed by

56 Horses of the Zar

a female Zar will be dressed up and treated as a woman. This is undoubtedly not easy for many Islamic men, which may indicate why relatively few men join the Zar cult. 'Ridden', a word that brings voodoo to mind, is also used to designate Zar obsession. Zar devotees are referred to as 'yazar faras' which means 'horse of the Zar'. The Arabian name 'Zara', according to Ibn Doreid's etymological dictionary derives from 'A Gama', meaning 'a hedge, a thicket' which is a remarkable parallel to the German 'Hexe' (witch) which comes from 'hedge-sitter' (see *Helrunar*). Abyssinian Muslims claim that the Zar spirits come from faraway over the ocean, while Abyssinian Christians know the Zar as descendants of Cain. Not all people in Egypt look kindly at Zar rituals. For long periods, Zar was only accepted at the fringes of society, and in a strictly Islamic setting. Zar healings come in two basic varieties: those for the rich, and those for the poor, who have to save up for months to afford the ritual. An Egyptian saying goes 'The woman with the rich husband says every month "I am sick!", the woman with the poor husband won't become sick.' The ceremonies are costly, so all devotees are asked to contribute as accords their social status. Obviously it is the shecha who carries most sacrificial dishes home, who profits most, and this is an acceptable part of the tradition. Another interesting tradition are the words chanted during the rite. A good many of them lost their meaning centuries ago, such as the chorus-words 'wedawa-wedeh; wadeh wadeh; wadaiya; away waiyeh', Though their meaning is unknown to the assembly these words are said to please the Zar, who like to come when they are chanted. Who says that the conscious mind has to comprehend and control the ritual? These 'chaos words' make sense to the spirits, who come, respond, and produce the desired change.



6 Kami of the Sacred Peaks

There are several distinct religions in Japan. Buddhism has been the strongest influence for the last centuries, but older and perhaps more closely attuned to the Japanese culture is the way of Shinto, and the worship of the Kami. Kami are spirits, often nature spirits or spirits of sacred sites, such as the Kami of a mountain, a bridge, a garden or a village. Like so many other spirits, the Kami originally came in a hierarchy, which was modelled closely on the warrior-aristocracy of ancient Japan. Kami-worship is popular all over Japan, especially in regions of great beauty. There you might see an old and twisted tree with a straw-rope barrier around it, or perhaps a jagged rock, and people would tell you that these are venerated as they house Kami. Special Kami are approached with great respect, and asked for help, blessing, healing and the like. The straw rope tells the worshippers which specific tree, well, rock or shrine houses a Kami. Maybe in the old times the rope signalled 'don't come closer or the Kami will bite!' Today, the rope is basically there to protect the Kami from the tourists. The Kami are known to chose especially beautiful trees, rocks etc. for their homes, yet not every beautiful tree is venerated as a Kami-home. It takes a special way of seeing to distinguish between a tree actively obsessed by a Kami and a very similar tree that houses none, or is still in the process of getting used to its Kami. In the high mountains of Japan, among the many sacred peaks, the cult of the Yamabushi survived. Yamabushi are mountain priest/warriors, well known for the extreme austerities and for their supposedly 'rough manners' and iron-

shod staffs, which have sent quite a few Samurai flying. The Yamabushi favoured many unusual forms of worship in their spiritual quest, some of them more common to dawn-age shamanism than to organised religion. This is especially interesting as Japan did not acquire shamanism the way Korea or South East Asia did, that is, by being conquered and occupied by the Mongol and Manchu hordes of the great central Asian plains. Though the Mongols tried to invade Japan they failed each time, and this is a strong indication that Japanese shamanism is an older art than the variety spread by the priesthood of the Mongol khans. In ancient times several cultures came to settle in Japan, each of them with a distinct way of dealing with the spirits. North Japanese islands are not far from Russia, and it is perhaps from there that elements of North Asian shamanism came to Nippon. Another interesting influence are the aboriginal Ainu people of north Japan, who come from a different race than the other people of the country. The Ainu practise a form of bear cult shamanism that seems related to the north Asian and European bear cults, many of which may go back to the earliest stone ages.

Yamabushi shamanism seems to be a blend of various spiritual disciplines. One of the aims of their religion is union and communication with a variety of Kami, gods or ancestors, who were usually contacted using a form of obsession or mediumship. There are several distinct types of mediums in Japan. One type of professional medium is recruited among the blind. These mediums go through a rigorous training to become pure enough to house the Kami or ancestors. Once they have become proficient in their art, they are approached by people who want to contact their ancestors, or desire help from the spirit worlds. Another type of medium comes to the spirits due to her or his excitable nature. Dr. Carmen Blacker quotes one such medium in her excellent *The Catalpa Bow*.

Then when I reached the age of seventeen I was reciting Sange Sange as usual when suddenly I felt my body begin to tremble and shake in a strange way. This was the first intimation I had of what it was like to be possessed by a god ... for the first three days after

60 Kami of the Sacred Peaks

the god possessed me my ribs and feet were very stiff and painful owing to the unaccustomed violent movements I had made during the seizure. I soon found that any god, not only Hayama, would come into me, and that this might happen at any time ... even now it is apt to happen whenever I get overexcited, so I have had to give up going to the shrine or thinking of the god very much... when the god comes into me I go into a kind of daze. I don't mean to say that I lose consciousness or go out of my mind, but I don't see clearly, and what I do is not done by me own will. At the fire walking, for example, it is not by my will that I walk across the fire. I am moved by the god's will entirely.

So much for the account of Mr. Otani, who is a farmer, apart from acting as a medium for the village. An important element in public mediumship is drama. Mediums tend to behave in wild and uncontrolled fashion, and this is exactly what the audience is waiting for. Dr. Blacker notes:

In every case we noticed that a trance was approved by the village as 'good' and genuine when the medium's behaviour was violent, inhuman and strange. Behaviour ordinary or human - as indecorous waving of the wand or a polite use of language - was instantly condemned as weak and unconvincing. To carry conviction the medium's behaviour must be inhuman; his voice must turn to a wild beast's roar or a bass unearthly scream; he must clash and flail his wand on the floor with a violence never seen in normal daily life; he must leap up and down from a cross-legged position on the floor, the higher into the air the better. Such are the fundamental symptoms of possession, recognised all over Japan.

It would be interesting to learn if all the spirits have to appear in such a furious fashion to be accepted by the audience. In my experience there are few spirits which appear in exactly the same fashion. Most of them make their style of obsession a highly unique art form. This, however, is not in any way suited to public appearance and great healings before

the gawking public. 'Dramatic' healings have much to do with play acting and giving the audience the entertainment it desires. The medium or shaman pretends the eternal 'as if,' which becomes the 'as is' in the act of doing. Such action is suggestive. To the patient the wildness of the medium suggests that great spirits are at work. To the audience, the fury of the medium suggests that the rite is in accord with tradition, and can be expected to work. Finally, the mad behaviour acts as a self-suggestion to the medium, and induces states of other-worldly ecstasy which make the healing possible. One widely used practise to amplify changes is the frequent use of the *kiai*, the spirit-shout that shatters time and projects energy in a willed outburst of power. Familiar to many students of the martial arts, shouts and screams can be used to increase and focus energy.

In Japanese mediumism, mind-piercing yells are used to mark special moments in ritual or to release overwhelming excitement. Early in the ritual, the mediums work themselves into a state of excitement and frenzy. They pray and recite sutras, speaking faster and faster, until the words become barely discernible, and are interrupted by groans, howls, and other weird noises. The hands clasped in a succession of mudras, breathing heavily, the mediums burst out in a couple of *kiai*, shaking and trembling, until the fit transforms and calms, and a given deity or ancestor has taken possession. In our innovative shamanism we can make use of a bit of screaming from time to time. Screams can be used to release extreme excitement, for instance, or to mark an important gesture or event, such as a banishing, a libation or the earthing at the end of the rite. Like spice, screams ought to be used in moderation. Though there seem to be some magical groups that equate sound volume with power and measure magical efficiency in decibels, I do not believe that one has to shout all of the time to be heard by the spirits. Nor is it necessary to scream oneself silly before one can induce change. It is a common misconception, fashionable with many gestalt therapists, that you can't have a healing without prior catharsis. Catharsis can be fun, you scream, howl, curse, rant and weep, smash a chair and collapse in a heap. Do you feel better now? Of course it's

62 Kami of the Sacred Peaks

nice to let pressure and rage out in such an exhibitionist way. Many people feel better after catharsis. The problem is that they haven't really changed anything. In a couple of days they'll feel awful again and need another bout of catharsis, which won't change anything either. Worse yet, they learn that the way to feel good requires frequent fits of catharsis. This can be pretty tough for the people they live with, not all of whom may enjoy 'confrontation politics', such as shouting abuse at each other. I can remember some instances where indulgence in catharsis made healing more difficult, as it focused so much attention on the release of strong emotions, and so little awareness on alternative modes of behaviour and thought.

Preliminary to mediumship in most Japanese belief-systems are a series of austerities. Most mediums, no matter how gifted, require a period of training and refinement to do their job well. Typical practises are prolonged fasting, prayers and the recitation of the Sutras. Many sacred texts are memorised, as they are known to control the more furious spirits. Lack of sleep is another important element, and even more so, regular showers of ice cold water. These are taken, several buckets every couple of hours, especially during the coldest months of winter. A traditional alternative is to squat under a waterfall, where mudra and mantra are practised, several times every day and night. Such practises are commonly used to train mediums. The Yamabushi warrior-priests add a number of austerities to this basic list. One of them, related to the fire element, has the priest seated between several big fires in the full glare of the noontime sun, reciting holy words, transforming consciousness with exhaustion. Similar to this practise is the well known rite of fire-walking, which is highly popular among some Japanese cults. In the cult of the goddess Kwannon, the devotees walk across a bed of glowing coals to honour their deity. It is their belief that the goddess descends from heaven on a huge dragon. This dragon is said to sit on the hot embers, so that the worshippers actually walk on the dragon, not on the fire, and do not get burned.

As a sign of their spiritual power, Yamabushi priests also demonstrate fire walking, and climb on bare feet a ladder made of sharp sword

blades. Such skills, however useful to impress the public, are basically side products of spiritual activity. Yamabushi often acquire such talents without actually desiring them. What they really care for is a refinement of character, and for this purpose they spend months and years doing pilgrimage, climbing the sacred mountains, praying in desolate places, meditating in solitude. The Yamabushi, like so many shamans all over the world, have a tradition that you can understand and transform yourself more easily when you are far from other people.

On their meditative journeys, the Yamabushi often encounter spirits. There exist many types of spirits in Japan, including gods, house-spirits, the Kami of a given place, the ancestors and some more dangerous entities, such as lascivious fox spirits or the rough mannered Tengu who taught the Yamabushi, and the Ninja, all sorts of nasty fighting tricks. In many cases, contact to the spirit was of a thoroughly practical value. A Yamabushi seeking meditation and solitude in a cave had best come to an agreement with the Kami of the place first. Or think of the ancestors! Many modern people class such spirits as 'the dead' and that's all there is to them. In many other climes and cultures, the dead were not dead at all, but on another plane of existence, in some other-worldly realm or in a magical space that interacts with known reality. These dead were venerated and contacted as they were anything but dead. The ancestors, so many cultures believe, can effect changes in the ordinary world. They have more wisdom than their living relations, as they see our world from outside and lack the glands that usually confuse the thinking of the living. Seen as a long flow of generations, the ancestors are the keepers of the knowledge of their lifetimes. Quite a few shamanic cultures obtained their wisdom of the past by evoking spirits who had long been dead (Nordic and Irish mythology contain some interesting samples of this custom). In such societies, the dead are not past but present. By contacting the ancestors, the living members of the family find access to a dream of continuity that can span hundreds and thousands of years.

Ancestral worship is common in Japan to this day. Many homes have a small shrine where the spirits of the ancestors are regularly fed with

64 Kami of the Sacred Peaks

food, incense and prayer. Each spirit is said to dwell in a little tablet bearing her/his former name. It is a common gesture to ask ancestral spirits for help in family and business matters, and to thank them for good luck and pay raises. If such spirits get attention and affection, they can work real changes, but if they are neglected, they may well become unhappy, and attract ill-luck. In this case a professional medium is contacted who accepts possession by the ancestor. Thus, the ancestor, speaking through the medium, can complain to the family, who will be eager enough to placate the angry spirit.

This sort of ritual has a long tradition in Japan. There are some modern religions in Japan however, that make possession by ancestral spirits a highly fashionable affair. Most of their members discover that they are obsessed, once they join, by some unhappy Samurai lord or lady who needs to be placated. Others claim that they are haunted by hosts of sex-hungry fox spirits, who have to be exorcised every other day. Luckily these new cults teach exorcism to all their new members and make something remarkably like a party-game out of the event.

Lowell, Dr. Blacker describes a seance of three people atop the holy mount Ontake. One of them has the role of the watcher. Another is the medium, who houses a given god or spirit, and the third works the rite and asks questions. The medium sits with his back to the shrine, the interrogator intones sacred mantras and practises complicated hand-mudra. Quite interesting is the detail that those mudra and mantra are well known from Yamabushi and Ninja rituals. Soon the medium begins to shake and tremble violently. After some extreme outbursts, the shaking calms into a continuous tremor, indicating that the deity has come in. Now is the time to ask questions. After awhile, the participants switch roles. The former medium gets a rest, doing the 'watcher', while the other two do the ritual and the obsession. 'Taking turns' is an idea I find highly refreshing. There are too many cults where the roles of the participants are fixed once and for all, and where people do the same stuff every rite, without even noticing how stuck they are.



7 The Second Coming of Christ

In 1706, the English midlands were the site of numerous religious outbursts as great congregations of Quakers appeared near Manchester. These people were soon to be called 'Shaking Quakers' or 'Shakers' due to their peculiar form of worship. The original sect considered itself a Christian organisation. It was then headed by James and Jane Wardley, whose good work it was to spread the message that 'the end is near' and 'the second coming of Christ is imminent'. It seems that there were lots of people who found 'the end of the world' a comforting thought, and the government found it hard to keep them under control. Already at this early date, the true believers cultivated a form of mediumship, combined with meditation and dance processions, that comes close to shamanism:

In their religious meetings, silence for a time might reign supreme, then, as the spirit of some departed soul, which, mayhap, had long before the flood left the world, sought out some devout brother or sister of that silent gathering, as a medium of communication, through which to testify of the joys of that life beyond the tomb, the chosen one would be seized with a violent trembling, and a mighty agitation of body and limbs. Then would the spirit be moved through the entire congregation of worshippers to such a degree that shouting, singing, and leaping for joy, they would swiftly pass and re-pass each other, like reeds shaken in a mighty wind. Then, as if acted upon by one all-pervading impulse, silence would fall, like the stillness of death upon the worshippers, while the chosen one would

recite, to their anxious listeners, the spirit message of love or warning.' (Robinson 1893)

In 1758, Ann Lee, a somewhat cranky young lady and her husband joined the Shaking Quakers. Finding solace from various neurotic strains in the great mission of saving souls, she was soon busy exciting the British public to religious hysteria. This soon led to persecution. In 1770, Ann Lee was jailed by the authorities who, as Shaker history reveals, tried to starve her to death. After her all-too-miraculous survival and release, Ann Lee had a new tale to tell. In jail, she claimed, she had witnessed the second coming of Christ, who had come to dwell within her. The 'second coming' was no longer a prophecy, it had become a statement of fact. More so, Christ would come again to any of the Shaking Quakers and make them vessels for Christ reborn.

What Ann Lee had discovered while she was fasting and praying in jail was quite simply magical obsession. She had made herself a vessel for Christ, and Christ had come into her flesh. This revolutionary notion transformed the entire belief structure of the Shaking Quakers. Each of them could become a witness of the living being of Jesus Christ by becoming his medium. When it came to converting people, this attitude was a great advantage. Unlike many other Christian sects, the newly reformed 'Shakers' had direct first-hand knowledge of their deity. When speaking of Jesus at the country fairs, these preachers knew what they were talking about, and often enough they got so enthusiastic that Jesus himself came into them, and made them preach and sing and heal. Miracle cures were a common sight at Shaker gatherings.

By 1774 the Shakers had made so many enemies that eight of their leading members and Mother Ann made a hasty departure to America. After a miraculous crossing of the Atlantic (Mother Lee protected the ship from a storm by praying so devoutly that the captain threatened to put her in chains) the Shakers moved through America and created a settlement somewhere outside of the inhabited country. There they set up a community that attempted to revive early Christian/Essene communism - uniform dress, mutual property, manufacture, work for

68 Second Coming of Christ

its own sake and any amount of common worship. The little community prospered, and soon there were others scattered over the country. As the Shakers lived in relative isolation, their forms of worship could develop without outside interference. Often the mediums received messages from Jesus or some spirits, and this knowledge led to the discovery of new customs, trance techniques or group dances. Swaying and shuddering seem to have been the core of these teachings.

At the close of the singing, one of the sisters began to rock her body to and fro; at first gently, then in a more violent manner, until two of the sisters, one on each side, supported her, else she would have fallen to the floor. She appeared to be wholly unconscious of her surroundings, and to be moved by an invisible power... the shaking of the subject continued to increase in violence, and it was with great difficulty that she could be restrained from throwing herself forcibly to the floor. Her limbs became rigid, her face took on an ashen hue, her lips moved and she began to speak in a clear and distinct voice ...for the space of fifteen minutes she spoke rapidly, yet impressively, her whole frame shaking from head to foot. (Robinson)

As a preparation for their worship, the Shakers practised a form of silent meditation. At other times they were busy with open air marching processions (recorded 1825) which occasionally included going into the fields to bless the coming crops. By 1782, Shaker worship involved what they called 'spontaneous, unpatterned charismatic acts', such as shouting, singing, preaching, speaking in tongues and dancing. In 1792 'slow and solemn' exercise was introduced, which was a type of square dance with bowing, while worded hymns and anthems were laid aside for wordless songs. Possession by spirits was one of the foundations of Shaker belief. Mediums would be obsessed by Jesus Christ, but they were also open for souls who had been drowned in the flood, or for the prophets of the *Bible*, all of whom had a lot to say on the virtues of clean living. In the various wars of the United States government against the native Indian nations, the Shakers made themselves unpopular by being sympathetic with the Indians, and by helping their refugees. In the

church record, Elder H.C. Blinner recorded: Evening meetings with singing, dancing, speaking in tongues, spiritual messages; lamentations for imperfections and penitence. Indian spirits came through instruments for spiritual instruction; 'instruments' is what the shaker mediums called themselves. The instruments would 'deport themselves very much as we might suppose the Indians would in their native state'. They departed after eight weeks.

Quite soon the Shakers began to develop 'automatic writing'. Elder Henry Blinner noted:

In 1840 the mediums who had heretofore spoken all their messages now commenced to write them in full, as dictated by their spirit-guides. Here, again, diverse forms of inspiration were manifested; some of the mediums heard the spirits speak and wrote their messages as a reporter would take a speech; others saw the spirit paper and read from it as one would read from a book... Even books were received and copied under the influence of inspiration, while hymns and anthems were sung as directed by these spirit guides .. . In the Autumn of this year, 1840, the mediums were impressed to deliver some of their messages in languages that we could not understand... most of these manifestations were proceeded by the gift of bowing or jerking or by the gift of whirling.

Due to their unusual form of social organisation, the Shakers were far from popular with their immediate neighbours. In the American civil war they assumed a pacifist attitude, and were treated as enemies by both warring factions. Mother Ann died a martyr's death in 1784. It was her custom to tour the country, doing missionary work with a few select brothers and sisters. Several times angry lynch mobs called her a witch and attempted to stone her to death. They finally succeeded in killing her by dragging her behind a cart over an icy road. Could this be a remnant of the old witch hunting beliefs, which claimed that people who had shaking fits were either in league with the Devil, or possessed by him?

In the Shaker's church record we read that four brothers and four

70 Second Coming of Christ

sisters were chosen to become instruments for the spirits of Father William, Father James, Father Job and Elder Benjamin, also of Mother Ann, Mother Lucy, Mother Hannah and Eldress Molly Chase. Apart from shaking, possession, dancing and inspirational songs, the Shakers received some bizarre techniques to change consciousness from the spirits. The techniques are well known from various forms of shamanism and Yoga, where they are practised to induce confusion and excitement. In Shaker worship they were meant as punishment to purify body and soul. Few Shakers realised that such practises can be pleasant. It depends on the attitude. Robinson wrote:

In the 'rolling exercise' they doubled head and feet together and rolled over and over like a wheel; or, stretching themselves prostrate, they turned swiftly over and over like a log. This was considered as debasing and mortifying the flesh. But still more demeaning were the 'jerks'. This exercise commonly began in the head, which would fly backward and forward and from side to side, with a quick jolt; then, with a violent dash on the ground, they would bounce from place to place, like a foot-ball; or they would hop about with head, limbs and body twitching and jolting in every direction. But the last possible grade of mortification culminated in the 'barks'. In this they were exercised to take the position of the dog, and move about upon all fours, growling and barking, snapping of teeth, having every appearance of a most vicious beast. These exercises were acknowledged, by the victims, as being brought upon them involuntarily, and in punishment for disobedience, or as a stimulus to incite them to perform some duty to which they were opposed.

Any child could have told the Shakers that such exercises can be fun. Children, however, were one of the weak points in Shaker communities, as they frowned on the topic of sex and kept men and women apart except at times of communal worship. In a way, the Shaker communities died out when their craft industries could no longer compete with industrial production, and there were no young ones to keep up the good work.

Like shamanism, Shaker religion involved plenty of excitement and enthusiasm. We frequently read of Shakers so entranced in bliss that they were thoroughly unconscious of everyday events. As Robinson mentioned:

Brother Thompson, at the Spring Sacrament, at Turtle Creek, in 1804 was constrained, just at the close of the meeting, to go to dancing, and for an hour or more to dance around the stand, all the while repeating in a low tone of voice - 'this is the Holy Ghost - glory!'



8 Seidr Under Midnight Skies

In the early 1200's, the Icelandic poet and politician Snorri Sturluson wrote a handbook for Skalds (Nordic bards) which is generally known as the *Prose Edda*. Most of this book was concerned with the art of making poems and songs. Snorri demonstrated several dozen ways of making 'staff rhymes' (alliteration), an art that was more refined and complicated in Iceland than anywhere else in the northern world. A staff-rhyme does not rhyme the way a Latin end rhyme does (e.g. you + true), instead it uses similar sounds in the beginning of words ('I see a hall far from the sun' = four staffs, see + sun, far + from). As examples of traditional poetry, Snorri included a number of legends from Pagan times, and these are the parts of the *Prose Edda* which are generally known. Did Snorri believe in these tales? Superficially, Snorri was a Christian, and Christianity was the Icelandic state religion. Iceland is the only place in Europe that accepted Christianity without violent conversion but by democratic election. Consequently there was less hate between the Pagan and Christian people and for several centuries people tended to believe in both creeds at once. In his introduction to the Eddic legends, which is often ignored by modern Odinists, Snorri assumed a Christian point of view, and stated that the gods, the 'Aesir' were actually a human family from Asia, and that the former chief-deity, Odin, was a human sorcerer. This attitude - 'explain the gods as mythical human heroes' is quite common in Nordic literature when Christian authors tried to strip Pagan myths of supernatural elements. In the *Gylfaginning*, however, Snorri either states or quotes that it is

74 Seidr Under Midnight Skies

his belief that Odin and his brothers rule the heaven and earth. The following text, also by Snorri, comes from the *Ynglinga Saga*, Chapter 6, translated after Golther. It shows the full ambiguity of the religious situation in the Pagan/Christian north of Europe, and gives a description of the magical arts of Odin. Compare these to the skills and techniques usually practised in shamanism if you like.

When Asa-Odin came to the north lands, and with him Lady Diar, it was truly said that they practised and taught arts which human beings have used ever since. Odin was the noblest of them all and from him they learned all arts, as he first knew them all and the most. And it should be said why he was so learned. This was for the following reasons: He appeared so beautiful and noble as he sat with his friends that all hearts laughed; but when he appeared among warriors he seemed grim to his foes, and this has the reason that he could change shape and appearance as he willed. Another of his arts was that he spoke so easy and smoothly that all who heard him thought him true. He always spoke in verse, as it is done today, and this is called the Art of the Skalds. He and his court-priests (Hofgoden) are called 'song-smiths', as from them the art spread through the north lands.

Odin could make that in battle his enemies became blind, deaf and terrified and that their weapons cut no more than twigs, while his own people fought without armour and were furious like dogs or wolves, they bit into their shields and became strong like bears and bulls. Odin could change his shape; his body would rest as in sleep or death but he became bird or beast, fish or worm, to travel instantly to far countries, in his own or other people's interest.

With simple words he could do this: extinguish fire, calm the sea, and turn the wind however he willed. Odin had a ship called Skidbladnir that helped him cross great oceans; it could be folded up like cloth. Odin carried the head of Mimir, which spoke many tidings from other worlds. Occasionally he woke dead people out of the earth or rested under the gallows; so he was named Lord of the

Ghosts and Lord of the Gallows. He had two ravens whom he had taught to speak, they flew far over land, bearing many news. Through these things he became very knowing. He taught all these arts through runes and songs, which are called 'Galdrar', and this is why the Aesir are called 'Galdrar-Smidir' (sorcery-smiths).

Odin understood the art that has most power and used it himself, which is called 'Seidr' (seething). And so he knew the fates of people and events yet to happen, could give death, ill-chance and disease to people; also he could steal wit and power from some people and give them to others. And this sorcery, when it is practised, had such an 'arge' nature that the men thought it not without shame to deal with it, and so the art was taught to the Goddesses.

Odin knew all the treasures in the earth and where they were hidden, and he knew such sorceries that the earth opened before him and mountains, stones and hills, and he bound with mere words those who dwelled nearby, went in and took what he willed. Through these powers he became very famous; his foes feared him, his friends trusted him and trusted his powers and himself. He taught most of his arts to the sacrificial priests, these came closest to him in wisdom and sorcery. Many others learned some of them, so his sorcery spread far and endured long. Odin made laws for his country which had been the law of the Aesir before. So he decided that all dead men should be burned and that they should be carried to the pyre with their possessions. He said everyone would come to Valhall with the riches that were on the pyre. And he would enjoy whatever he had buried in the earth. The ashes should be carried to the sea or buried in the earth. Hills should be built to honour nobles and a memorial stone should be set for all who were brave. And this custom endured long.

Odin was mortally ill in Sweden and when it came to dying he had himself marked with the spear-point, taking all who die of weapons for himself. He said he would travel to the House of the Gods to meet his friends. The Swedish believed that he had gone to Old Asgard and that he would live there forever. Then grew new faith and calling on

76 Seidr Under Midnight Skies

Odin. Often the Swedish believed that he would appear before great battles, giving luck to one host and taking the other for himself, and both lots were good. Odin was burned after his death and the pyre was splendidly prepared. It was their belief that the higher the smoke rises in the air, the more honoured was he who was burned, and the wealthier the more goods were burned.

Apart from being an interesting account of the cult of Odin, this text supplies us with an insight into the nature of Seidr-Magick. First of all you will notice that Seidr enjoys a dubious reputation. This is hardly surprising when you consider that in Snorri's time, most Paganism was a bit shady, and Seidr, as an old and powerful art, had acquired its ill-fame already in Pagan times. Keep in mind that all of our source-texts on Seidr come from people who were not very sympathetic with it; what the Seidr-mages themselves thought of their art is not recorded.

In Snorri's text, Seidr is said to have an 'arge' nature. 'Arg', in modern German, means something like 'evil'. In older times, the meaning of 'arg' was different. Old High German *arg*, Old English *earg*, Old Swedish *arg* had a variety of meanings, such as 'fearful', 'sinful', 'lustful', 'dangerous', which gives a certain sexual quality to the term. The word comes from Indo European * *Ergh* - 'to move heavily, to tremble, to quiver, to be excited' which describes a seething trance pretty well. Related is the old Greek 'orcheisthei' meaning 'to quake, shake, leap, dance' which is the source of the word 'orchestra'. It is quite likely that the lustful tremors of the Seidr trance seemed shameful to the prudish men of Viking society.

The expression 'arg' also appears in other texts. In the Eddie *Lokasenna* Odin and Loki accuse each other of having an 'argr' nature, before wise Frigg interferes and asks them not to reveal the old stories to the public. What Odin is accused of is wandering around in the shape of a vala (a wise woman), foretelling the future and misleading people. Maybe these lines indicate that to German valas, obsession by Odin was common, as it is in many shamanic systems where the spirits chose their mediums without concern for age or sex. Loki in return is accused of having been a milk-giving cow and mother.

In one little known Nordic tale, recorded by Olrik and quoted by Dumezil, the gods wonder which animals have the toughest life. Loki is volunteered to find out, and lives some lives in beast forms. Returning to the Aesir he states that it was tough as a seal, fighting the cold winds and the fury of the waves. Being a bird and laying an egg was worse, but the greatest trial was being a horse, and pregnant with Grani. According to the *Prose Edda*, Loki gave birth to Sleipnir, Odin's eight legged horse. Actually Grani is not Odin's but Sigurd's horse, but the shepherd who told the story to Olrik did not care much for such small details. Odin and Loki do more shape-changing, and sex-changing, than the other Nordic deities, which may explain why they seemed pretty 'argr' to the rather prudish people of Norse society.

What was Seidr Magick all about? This is a rather difficult question, as so few reliable descriptions of the art have survived. To several Nordic authors, Seidr and sorcery were synonymous. Others assumed that the people who heard a tale would know all about Seidr anyway and still others wanted to tell a good dramatic story involving plenty of evil magic. If the magic has been as evil as the Nordic authors made it, it must have been a sinister art indeed. Personally, I suspect that Seidr Magic is a fairly old phenomenon going back right to the old days of stone age shamanism. In Viking times - and most of our data comes from that period - Seidr seems to have been a rare phenomenon already, which raises the question how distorted the accounts may be. I shall now proceed to give some tales relating to Seidr. How much of them refers to genuine magic, and how much constitutes unfriendly slander is for you to decide. Old Nordic had several expressions for seething-practise, such as: 'sida, efla Seid, fremja Seid, setja Seid'. Male practitioners were called 'Seidmadr' or 'Seidberandi', female seidartists were called 'Seidkona'. In literature, the latter appear more frequently. There are several detailed descriptions of seething-women. What makes the issue confusing is the fact that Nordic authors tend to mix up valas and volvas (Nordic priestesses) with Seidr-ladies. While it is likely that some valas practised Seidr, I find it highly doubtful that all Seidr ladies were actually valas, and associated with a regular religion.

78 Seidr Under Midnight Skies

The *Saga of Erik the Red* gives a good description of a volva who practised Seidr. At the end of the tenth century there was great famine, poverty and plague in Greenland. Thorkel, a rich peasant, invited the famed seeress Thorbjorg, who was called a 'spakuna', a truth-speaking woman. Each winter she used to go travelling, visiting people and working prophecy for them. Thorkel had all prepared for the visit of the noble lady. A high seat was prepared, and padded with duck-down. A servant was sent to receive her. The spakuna appeared wearing a mantle of dark blue cloth (like the cloak of Odin, and the kings' cloaks of old Germany and according to Plato, Atlantis), all covered with precious stones and glass beads. She had a hood of black lambs fleece with white cat fur to the inside and a girdle which held the taufr ('teafor' = to make red, i.e. sorcery equipment). She had a massive staff, its head inlaid with brass and gems, her shoes were of calfskin with long straps and big brass buckles, and her gloves of cat fur, the inside white and bushy. Thorkel greeted her gladly and led her through house and stables, to show her all rooms, all residents and all animals. In the evening they had a great feast, but the seeress seemed silent and withdrawn. When Thorkel asked for prophecy, she replied that she needed a night to sleep over it. The next day the Seidr was prepared. When evening came the seeress took her place in the 'seidhjallr', the 'seething chair' and asked the women to form a circle round her, to sing the *vardlokkur*. This is a difficult word. 'Lokkur' means to lure, to entice; i.e. 'to invoke', it can also mean 'to lock, to bind, to bolt' i.e. to fix something. 'Vard' can come from Old Norwegian: *vord*, Old Swedish, *vard* which mean 'guardian, helping spirit', it could also derive from 'wyrd' or 'urd', meaning fate, destiny, the weaver and the woven. In the *Grogaldr*, verse 7, the term is given as 'urdar lokur': 'this also I sing, as you may go erring on wide ways without bliss: the 'urdar lokur' shall always protect when shameful sights are seen'. Most translators tend to use 'urdas lock' to explain the term, with few ideas what this lock may be all about. Thus we can explain 'vardlokkur' as 'to lure, entice and bind fate and guardian spirits'. The term later became the word 'warlock'.

To continue. The Spakuna asked the women to sing the Vardlokkur,



80 Seidr Under Midnight Skies

but none of them knew these songs. Then a lady called Gudrid said: 'I am not wise in sorcery nor a wise woman, but my nurse in Iceland taught me songs which she called *Vardlokkur*. These songs, and what is part of them, are of such nature that I as a Christian cannot sing them'. Then Thorkel and the others pleaded until she agreed to perform. The women formed a circle around the seething chair and Gudrid sang the chants so well that all present thought that they had never heard anything as beautiful. Then the volva declared that the song was well done, and that the spirits had all come to listen, and that the spirits thought the song beautiful, and that they were obedient now which they hadn't been before. So the spirits spoke to the Spakuna, and she prophesied prosperity, and the end of plague and famine, and a rich marriage for Gudrid. Then the people approached the seeress, each with a question, and her oracles were so good that little went against what she had prophesied.

The *Orvar-Oddssaga*, Chapter 2, mentions a volva and seidkona called Heidr, who knew all that was to come through her art, and who travelled from feast to feast, to reveal fate to all who were daring enough to ask, and pay her price. She had an entourage of fifteen girls and fifteen boys with her, who probably chanted for the wise lady. In the sagas that describe how Iceland was settled (*Vatnsdolasaga* 10, *Landnama* 3,2) another volva named Heidr appeared, who had Finnish blood. When asked to prophecy for the young heroes Ingimund and Grim, she foretells their journey to Iceland and says that as a sign of truth, the silver Frey idol of Ingimund would disappear from his pouch and reappear the day when he would dig holes for the pillars of his new hall. Freyr was a god of fertility and sexual potency, which may mean that Ingimund became impotent. Though the heroes don't believe her it all turns out as foretold. Another seidkona, called Thordis, is also mentioned. She was consulted to give legal advice at the Icelandic Thing (Assembly of the people). The saga says she wore a black coat with a hood and had a staff named 'Hognudr'. When she touched the left cheek of a man with it thrice his memory was lost, and if she touched his right cheek three times with the staff, he would remember again. It

has been suggested that the names 'Volor'' 'Volva' and 'Vala' (all three describe Germanic priestesses) come from Old Norse: *valr*, a staff, making them 'staffbearing women'.

What was Seidr magic used for?

So far, our samples have shown that it was often related to prophecy, which may be considered (passively) as divination, and (actively) as a mode of making fate, or binding it under will. In Nordic philosophy, fate was considered a weaving that was influenced by all living beings. People could influence fate, and shape it to some extent, which is a long way from the fatalism which requires people to sit still and suffer. Some sagas mention that Seidr can be used to arouse or calm the sea storm. You could ask a seidmage to excite a storm for you, or to save a ship from a storm. For this trick, the cunning seether used to transform into a whale, and swim around the ship to calm the waves. Seidr magick was also good to raise darkness, fog and evil weather, to blind or confuse enemies, to make people iron-proof and to change the future. Seidr was occasionally used for magical attacks, if we can trust the hearsay evidence of some sagas. In the *Laxdolasaga* 37, there is great hate and fighting between the families of Hrutr and Thorleikr. The latter hired a pair of seidmages, one Kotkell and his wife Grima, to harm Hrutr with sorcery. The seidmages, with their sons, travelled to Hrutr's house. At night the seidr chant came from the roof of the house, and Hrutr's family wondered what it might be, and thought it beautiful, but Hrutr understood it all too well. He gave orders that none should leave the house nor even look out, and that they should keep each other awake. All through the long, cold night the chant ebbed and flowed through the dark, and before long, Hrutr's family fell asleep. Only Hrutr's son Kari couldn't rest. The Seidr was aimed at him, so he became edgy, and then rushed out. As he beheld the Seidr rite he collapsed and died. The *Ynglingasaga* tells of a Finnish Seidr lady named Huldr, who was asked

82 Seidr Under Midnight Skies

by the Finnish queen to force the hero Wanlandi out of his exile in Uppsala back to Finland, or slay him. As a nightmare she came over the sleeping hero and crushed him to death.

In the 14th century *Bosasaga* the king Hring wanted to kill the heroes Bosi and Herraud. The sorceress Busla averted this by going to King Hring (in the astral or the flesh?), where she sang the curse known as 'Busla's Pleading'. Let me quote some lines:

Hear Busla's pleading, soon it will be sung, all shall hear it, all over the world, evil to all who listen, worst for him to whom it is addressed. Creatures shall walk in madness, exceptional events shall happen, rocks shall shudder, worlds shall tremble, weathers shall rage, unless you give peace to Herraud and protection to Bosi! Your heart shall be devoured by worms, your ear shall cease hearing, your eyes shall burst out of your head!

The king woke from this chanting, but found he couldn't move or call for help. Paralysed he had to lie and listen, while Busla cursed him with every trick in the book. Sailing, his rigging shall burst and the sails be torn to shreds! Riding, the bridle shall break and the horse go lame! All his paths shall be in the hands of brigands and monsters! When in bed, he shall feel aflame, and in the high seat as if riding the high waves!

Trolls, elves, red norns (tofrnornir) and mountain giants shall set your halls aflame! Frost giants shall hate you, stallions kick you, straw stab you, storm numb you, pain shall be yours unless you do my will!

Last came the fatal verses that may not be spoken after sunset.

Six shall come, guess their names, they are unbound and I will reveal them: unless you guess them aright, dogs shall devour you and your hall shall sink to Hell.

Guess their names, or all the evil I have raised shall come over you, unless you do my will!

The riddle of Busla remains a riddle to this day. The fourth rune could possibly be a distorted kienaz rune, but it could also be a sign we can't identify nowadays. Either way, the word makes little sense. What shall we make of Busla's sorceries? No doubt the cunning vala believed she was doing a good job when she cursed King Hring and saved the hero Bosi. Can a curse be morally acceptable? Here we get into deep waters indeed. Seidr magic often had a shady reputation as 'magic for sale' and if we can trust the evidence of the sagas, no doubt a good many Seidr mages were eager to curse anyone, provided the price was right. It would be easy to condemn such behaviour as 'unspiritual' or 'black magic', but if we do so, we ought to remember that such verdicts arise from the Judaic-Christian code of ethics. Mosaic law states 'thou shalt not murder', and continues with the notion that God punishes all offenders. In Viking society, it was not God but the family of the slain who set out to punish a murderer. 'Murder' was a social crime, not an offence against God-given laws, and indeed, the Viking code, as you can find it in the *Havamal* is basically a social code of behaviour. *Havamal* means 'Song of the High One', i.e. the song given by Odin. It is an interesting detail that this song, though it claims to be the 'Song of God' consists of advice and suggestions on everyday matters. There are no laws in it nor commandments, nor are there any religious regulations, so that one gets the impression that Odin wanted to give some useful hints to humanity, but left them the freedom and obligation to worship and act as they chose. Unlike the god of the Old Testament, Odin does not utter prohibitions or taboos. Instead, we are reminded that we have to live with the consequences of our doing.

What do you think about selling sorcery? Superficially, our modern western society likes to consider spirituality and money-making as two very distinct and largely incompatible ideas. In his more communistic speeches, Jesus raved against the notion that a rich man could go to heaven, and blessed the poor for the simple fact that they were poor. This produced the popular idea that spiritual people are poor, and rich

84 Seidr Under Midnight Skies

people are not spiritual. Is there a special grace to poverty? What are the virtues of lack and hunger? Some cultures equate spiritual grace with poverty, and estimate saintliness by what people can do without. In other cultures spiritual wealth and material wealth reflect each other, and priests are notoriously expensive. A Yoruba priest once told me that if I'd only give him 5000DM, he would make me a priest of the Akom religion within three years. Now this man didn't know anything about me, and apparently the will to pay would have been sufficient qualification in his eyes. It wasn't such a genuine offer either, as genuine training in the Akom religion takes more than a dozen years, and this priest wasn't fully trained. The idea of payment for initiation, however, is a common one in African religion and sorcery. You can find a very similar tradition in India, where the Chela had to feed, house, clothe and support the Guru for years to make up for all the spiritual blessings. Whether money-making and spirituality go hand in hand or conflict seems to depend on what you believe. By the way, how many spiritually-minded people do you know who live in lack and poverty as they believe they have no choice about it and, anyway, 'you can't have it all'?

Another interesting issue is the use of Seidr for magical attack. Is it ethical to use 'spiritual power' for such ends? In recent years, there has been a lot of fuss about the topic of 'fighting magic'. Certain magical groups have made it a basic part of their elementary training, and for good reasons, too. A lot of beginners in magic feel overwhelmed, if not afraid of the great unknown, and paranoia is a natural reaction. For some curious reason, magical novices often feel that they are 'under attack' by some evil coven, black sorcerer or nasty demon, while more advanced magicians are usually too busy doing their will to bother about all the fighting and defending. I've known people who were 'under attack' every other week, which goes to show just how important they were. Of course they 'fought back' with all their might, directing all sorts of reflection spells and curses at their imaginary enemies, and guess who got hurt in the process? This sort of thing happens easily once people begin to think in terms of fighting. The better sort of magicians are aware that there are more important things

than 'dog-eats-dog-politics', they do their will and the world takes care of itself. I have been asked if seething trances can be used for magical assaults. What would you reply to this question? As it is, I dearly hope that you have better things to do with it. Seething offers a wealth of magical blessings and a wide field for self-exploration. If you see it as a tool to hurt others you are missing something vital, and short-changing yourself. How about asking your guardian spirits to take care of all the fighting and defending, so that you can concentrate on more rewarding activities?

Nordic sagas offer plenty of evidence for the existence of Seidr-shamanism right up to the Christian era. You may have noticed that on the whole the saga-authors were more interested in the costume of a given seeress than in the practises she needed to attain her visionary state. Quite typically there were many women involved in the practise of Seidr, which is in accord with many shamanic systems. In Viking society, men were the dominant force when it came to law-giving, politics and foreign policy. These men however, were basically strong and proud when they journeyed over the *Gannet's Bath* (the ocean) to find trade and plunder in distant lands. A healthy Viking male was expected to go travelling, at least every other year, and to come home bearing foreign treasures. In the meantime, the women ruled over home and farm, controlled the family wealth, brought the kids up and ordered the servants around. These women were in full control in their homes, and often enough they outlived their husbands. Few Viking men made it over the age of thirty-five, and those who did were considered old and useless by the younger generation. Thus, while Viking society was superficially a patriarchal system, in practise it was the old ladies who had most wealth and influence in society. Women would grow old and become increasingly respectable. If a man wanted to grow old in honour, he had to be very noble indeed. Women who were honoured for their magic are not uncommon in northern Europe. The sagas give most evidence for this, and the classical Greek and Roman authors, who wrote about conditions in Germany, Gaul and Britain long before the Viking age, tend to agree. The woman Weleda, for instance, was

86 Seidr Under Midnight Skies

honoured as a Vala by several tribes living near Cologne. She lived in a tower, spoke prophecy and almost managed to incite the tribes to overthrow the Romans. Caesar described how, in German tribes, the mothers did the rune divination to determine battle strategy. There is also some archaeological evidence. As you may know, there were quite a few objects which were blessed with rune inscriptions. Usually it was sword blades and spear-points, which became more lethal with the enchantment of the runes, or items of jewellery, such as brooches, fibula, pendants and bracelets, many of which were rune-blessed to give good luck or invoke the help of a god. A highly unique rune inscription was found in the grave of a noble Alamannic lady (6th century) near Neudingen, Baden-Wurttemberg. She had a loom in her mound, and this loom was a large and expensive item with four independent foot pedals. It had the following rune inscription.

LBI.IMUBA:HAMALE:BLITHGUTH:URAIT RUNA
I BI.IPIABR:HPHFTM:BNEXNEARBITRANT

'Lbi' could possibly mean 'love'. 'Imuba' is the name of the lady whose loom it was. 'Hamal' is the name of the man who gave it to her, probably as a present. 'Blithguth' is the name of the lady who blessed the loom with her rune magic. The *Edda* mentions several cases of Seidr magic, and a surprising amount of valas, living or dead, who tend to work as diviners and prophets. That most cryptic of Eddic poems, the *Voluspa*, is literally 'the truth-speaking of the vala'. Seated at the well under the tree, the entranced vala sees past, present and future revealed in a timeless vision. Like the inspired poet Taliesin she seems to function in a consciousness that goes beyond individuality. Much like the seidmages of Iceland and Scandinavia, the prophetess is honoured and paid for her troubles. Odin himself, who has invented Seidr, consults the enchanted vala and pays her 'garlands and rings for golden words and far reaching sense' (vol. 24). In the *Voluspa* the vala describes the entire history of the world. This account is somewhat garbled, especially in

the verses which hint at an enigmatic seidkuna. Fairly early in the *Voluspa*, after the creation of the world, we find reference to three giant daughters who came from giant-home Jotunheim, strong in power and a threat to the gods. At this point the story changes abruptly, and describes the creation of dwarves, after which the gods go out and make humans out of trees. Next the vala tells of that world tree, its triple well and guardians, and describes herself, as she is speaking prophecy to Odin. A list of Valkyrie follows, and then we are back at the earlier story.

Then the first murder was known in the world
when with staffs they stabbed Gulveig
in the Hall of Har. She burned brightly.

Thrice burned she is thrice reborn
often, not rarely, yet she is alive.

As Heid she was known wherever she went
well speaking vala taming wolves (or: with her seer spirit)
She could work Seid Seid making mad (or: stealing reason)
highly beloved by all loose people'.

(*Vol*25, 26.)

Instead of continuing at this interesting point, the narration moves to other topics. Should the Aesir pay dues to others? Should all gods receive sacrifice? Before we come to solve these problems the story digresses into politics. The divine tribes of Aesir and Vanir war with each other, and the line 'then the first murder was known in the world' reappears as the armies clash. Before they get a chance to sort themselves out the tale moves on to the building of Asgard by a giant stone mason. If you consider the story so far, you may notice that either the seeress was a bit confused, or she had a lousy editor. Snorri's *Prose Edda* relates the three giant daughters to the end of the Golden Age. 'Gulveig', who may or may not be identical with the vala Heid, means something like 'The Golden Force' or 'The power of gold'. The name has led historians and linguists into passionate fits of comparative mythology, leading to the declaration of various profound insights. 'Gulveig' symbolises, as anyone can see, 1. The metal gold and the art

88 Seidr Under Midnight Skies

of working it. 2. Wealth, riches and prosperity. 3. The invention of money. 4. Commercialism as such. 5. The golden age of peace and plenty. 6. Solar worship. 7. The radiant goddess Freya. 8. Matriarchal society. 9. A human sacrifice, or 10. Fertility cults, which are always useful when shrivelled old intellectuals have to invent a mouth-watering explanation. The nature of Gulveig is perplexing, but the nature of Heid is pretty obvious. The sacred vala didn't like her much, and thought less of her sorceries. Enchanted valas appear in several Eddic poems. In the *Song of Vegdam*, Odin rides all the way down to Niflheim, passing the 'High House of Hel' he rides to the eastern gate where the vala rests in her barrow. Facing north he pounds the earth with his staff, till perforce she rises, declaring doom. 'Who of all men, unknown to me, suffers me to wake and rise?' asks the vala: 'Snow covered me, rain drenched me, dew soaked me, I was dead so long'. Here we encounter the magic of necromancy, the art of consulting the spirits of the dead to learn the past and future. Necromancy was an acceptable way of gaining information in the old North. One method was known as 'utisetá', which means 'to sit outside'. To practise utisetá you simply had to spend a time alone, away from people, in the forest, on a mountain or at some wild, natural place, preferably at night. Then you sat down and waited for visions, spirits and things that go bump in the dark. With utisetá, you had a chance to contact ghosts. You could also get in contact with other entities, and count yourself lucky if you came home in one piece. It depends on where you wait, and what comes and responds. Similar practises of 'vision-questing' are known from many shamanic cultures. Most shamans seek loneliness at some time or other, and leave the human world. 'Utiseta', however, is more than just a few nights in the wilderness. People don't get visions just because they are cold and lonely. The best place of power is no guarantee that you actually learn anything interesting if the proper attitude is lacking. 'Utiseta' describes this attitude. You sit outside. Outside of your house, outside the settlement, outside human society. Outside of your personality, outside of your beliefs, outside your usual thought patterns. When the self ceases to function as a personality, it becomes atmospheric, void

and wonderful. This makes the awareness sufficiently timeless that communication across time may take place. To chant 'Valgaldr' - sorcery chants for the slain - makes the rite easier. Then there is the practise of pounding the earth. Odin hits the hill of the dead vala to wake her, and this method occurs commonly in necromantic tales.

Icelandic folk tales describe how spirits can be pestered out of their mounds using precisely this method. Another example comes from the Taunus Mountains in Hessen. Deep within the forest, not far from a Celtic (and pre-Celtic) mountain-fortress rears a huge stone block out of the spruce. The rock is called 'The Hen's Rock' as one can see or imagine a great big vicious hen in its sharp outline. In the old days, the legend goes, the forest was deeper and darker. Imagine a group of children. They are picking herbs in the clearings. The path goes this way and that, and disappears. Before them, towering in the gloom, the Hen's Rock appears. 'This really is a hen' says one of the older girls 'we have to be silent here'. 'Where's the hen? I can't see any!' shouts one of the boys. 'It's in there' says she, 'please be silent. The hen is in this rock and those smaller rocks up the slope are the chickens'. 'What nonsense' says the boy. He smiles as he approaches the rock. Then he picks up a stick, takes a deep breath, and hits the rock. 'Come out you stupid hen!' he screams as he pounds the stone madly. (Imagine the other kids, as they stare with horrid fascination. Imagine the rock, as it opens in a blaze of fire. Imagine the screams, and the blinding brightness, and the crazy flickering lights.) The children run in panic. The boy falls over backwards, little lights like golden chickens spinning around him. Later, the children return and pick him up. As is customary in respectable folk tales and reports of UFO sightings, the contactee is speechless about the experience. Another version of the tale claims that if you kick the rock, the hen and the chicken will come out and suck your blood. Raising the spirits of the deep can be quite simple an occasion. The real art is getting along with them.

Odin made things easy for himself when he went to the mound of the dead vala to wake her. It is often easier to contact a specific ghost when one has some sort of link - such as its dead body - to make contact.

90 Seidr Under Midnight Skies

'Pounding the earth' can also be used for evocations of other spirits. If you chant and call for some spirit to appear, this can be amplified if you sway a little and pound the earth with your hand, indicating you want the spirit to home *here*. This gesture emphasises your intention, your calling, and the response you desire. The suggestions can mean 'come to me', or it can mean 'come out of the deep', just as you will. Of course the spirit won't actually come in physical form to the physical spot your physical hand is pounding. It will appear to your imagination, to your mind's eye, to your inner ear, as suits both of you. The physical action - one of the older tricks of stone-age magick - is useful to get you excited and carried away. A little sweat can work wonders when it comes to signal determination, passion and commitment.

Another dead vala in the *Edda* is the 'Groa' (to green, to grow) who is evoked by her son. Responding kindly, she blesses him and protects him with advice and sorcery chants. Older still is the giant lady 'Hyndla', the 'houndish' or 'wolfish one', who is called out of her barrow by the love goddess Freya.

Wake, maiden of maidens, my friend, come, awake,
Hyndla, sister, cave dweller
Night reigns and fog, come let us ride
to Valhall, to the halls of the holy.

Freya had been approached by young Ottar who had made a bet with a friend concerning who is of older and better ancestry. Indeed, Ottar had been clever enough to build a shrine for Freya, its walls agleam with amber and glass, and poured the blood of oxen to her regularly. So Freya, who lacked the required knowledge of Ottar's family tree, went out to the mound of the Hyndla, who was of an older race. I heartily recommend that you read the story, in the *Hyndluliod*, as it is very amusing. Perhaps it is a sample of Seidr practise, as Seidr is an art reputedly taught by Odin to Freya, who taught it to some of her priests. Parts of the Hyndla's song are an extremely complicated genealogy of young Ottar's ancestors, of whom the Hyndla mentions more than fifty ('all these are your kin - Ottar you twit - know and remember - would you wish more?') Then she goes completely frantic and recalls the

ancestry of gods and giants, leaving Ottar confused and bewildered, and his patroness Freya demanding the ale of memory for him. Verse 32 is interesting as it informs us that 'from Widolf came the valas all - all sorcerers are Wilmeidi's spawn - the seidr folk came from Swarthofdi - and from Ymir all the giants'. 'Widolf is the name of a giant, meaning 'forest dweller'. The sorcerers are the people who sacrifice, who perform the rites of the blot, who carve runes and colour them red. Their ancestor is of questionable etymology. Perhaps 'Wilmeidi' has to do with Wili, (Honir) the brother of Odin, and with the 'meid', which means a tree. 'Swarthofdi', the ancestor of the Seidr-artists, means 'black head' and was a giant, and the same goes for Ymir (perhaps 'roaring, rushing') who was the first and greatest of the giant race. It may mean something that the poem lists all these dodgy and shady ancient systems of magic without a single reference to the 'Hofgoden', that is, the regular and approved high priesthood. In another interesting verse, the Hyndla gives a description of Freya, which may say something of the 'argr nature' of the love goddess.

You ran in a fury hungry for men
 Many have slipped under your skirts.
 Run in love-heat through long nights
 As between he-goats a she-goat runs! (*Hynd.* 44)

This sort of conduct, which is pretty natural for a goddess of love, is far from the behaviour expected in Viking society. As you may recall, Freya is not one of the Aesir gods but came from the tribe of the Vanir, where morals were more easygoing and 'the beautiful ones, it does no harm, chose their lovers as they like', as Njord, the father of Freya put it.

In Nordic legends, 'Seidr' did not only refer to an eldritch type of sorcery but also to the act of seething food and drink. Nordic cuisine was very fond of boiling meat to shreds, with and without spices, and a big meat portion was the first demand of each hero. Most popular was the meat of pigs, as it contained more fat than cattle or game. In the cold

92 Seidr Under Midnight Skies

north, before the advent of central heating, fat was one of the most essential foodstuffs, and pig's meat was considered sacred. Food was commonly prepared in cauldrons, and there was some magic to the cooking. The *Grimnismal* (42) gives an enigmatic verse on this topic:

Blessed by Ullr and all the Aesir
Is he who puts out the flaming pyre
A wide view opens to the sons of the Aesir
When the cauldron comes out of the flames.

Little is known of Ullr apart from his reputation that he is a god of cold winter. One of the ideas behind these lines makes the cauldron an object of transformation. The cauldron unites the elements as it seethes the food to ripeness. Meat becomes food, water becomes broth, and when the cauldron is opened, the smell of the food arises and nourishes the gods. Perhaps the verse suggests not only a cauldron, but also a Seidr ritual. In seething trances, the Seidr-mage cooks her or himself to ripeness. After the shaking, however, when 'the cauldron comes out of the flames', the gods feast on the scent (energy), and a 'wide vision' or a 'wide view' opens to the Seidr-mage, who is usually very open and impressionable at the time. The term 'Seidr' was also used to describe fermentation. To make mead, for instance, the honey and water mixture had to ferment, which was called 'seething' the resulting broth being called the 'sud'. The same went for the sacred art of beer making. Celtic and German beer had less alcohol than the modern equivalent, it contained no hops and could not be kept for more than a few days. This means that if you wanted to invite people for a feast, you had to prepare a lot of beer, which was usually drunk to the last drop, as it couldn't be preserved. To make the beer stronger, it was commonly laced with spices, such as oak leaves, leek, mugwort, and occasionally stronger drugs, such as belladonna and thornapple. There are several cases of 'forgetfulness potions' in the old sagas, and a couple of murders by poison. All of these were once part of the Seidr-tradition, which did not improve its reputation.

Another important aspect of Seidr magick consisted of what you might call 'astral projection in altered shape and consciousness'. You

may remember that seidmage who saved a ship by transforming himself into a whale, and swimming around the ship thus calming the stormy waves. A story like this implies that to a seidmage, it was possible to project consciousness and to work change on the physical plane. The 'valkyrie' (choosers of the slain) have a similar reputation. Some valkyrie are spiritual, and semi-divine beings who haunt battlefields and carry the slain heroes to Odin's feast in Valhall. Another sort of valkyrie was alive on earth in Viking times. These valkyrie were noble ladies who could send out their awareness as they liked. In the shape of a swan or eagle these ladies would fly to the battlefield where they sought to protect their spouses, and to cast paralysing fear into their enemies.

In the Icelandic version of the *Saga of King Hrolf Kraki* a similar case is described. At the end of a troubled lifetime, King Hrolf was betrayed by his vassals. One of them was a sorceress, who was called Skulda, like the Norn in the *Edda*. She advised her husband Hiorwardh to go to King Hrolf's yule feast with strong troops. In the middle of the night, when the carousal was most glorious, Hiorwardh's warriors surrounded the hall and threatened to set it alight. So Hrolf and his warriors had a last minne-cup of golden mead, and rushed out of the hall, raging like wild beasts. The fight was bloody and furious, but Hrolf's old friend Bodhwar was nowhere to be seen. In his place, and always where the fighting was hardest, a huge dark bear was grimly fighting, crushing four warriors with each blow. As long as the bear led the charge, the battle seemed hopeful, but then one of Hrolf's men stumbled into the desolate hall, and found Bodhwar, in his underwear, and obviously asleep. Being woken, Bodhwar was in a vile mood. 'I will do my best for the king', he said 'but it will be less than I did before!' and indeed, as soon as Bodhwar woke, the great bear disappeared and the king's luck turned for the worse. As the saga put it: 'Queen Skuld could not achieve success as long as the bear was among Hrolf's folk, even though she was seated on a Seidr-chair in a black tent'. As soon as Bodhwar, whose father was a bear, had joined the battle in human form, the sorceress released a wolf-grey magical boar whose bristles shot out like poison arrows, and Hrolf Kraki's men found (heir death.

94 Seidr Under Midnight Skies

This episode is interesting in that it shows two seidmages fighting each other during a battle. Another interesting point is the reference to the black tent. Several traditions of trance magic actively make use of darkness to improve the imagination.

In a similar way, I get clearer imaginary visions and recall when I sit in the dark, which is something I can enjoy for hours. Other people get the same effect in broad daylight. What is it like for you? When you observe your inner pictures, do you project them against a bright or a dark background? Under which light-conditions can you perceive your imagination best? People differ, and the darkness that makes me feel excited and awake sends others into depression or sleep. Likewise, I find it much easier to do astral projection in daytime when I put a cloth over my eyes, as the pictures become more vivid. How does it work for you?

Some researchers, such as Golther and Uhland, proposed that Seidr magic is rooted in Finnish sorcery. They noted that the Norwegian district of 'Halogaland' (Holy Land), which is right next to the Finmark, was the basic centre of Pagan resistance against the cult of Christ, which spread through Scandinavia from south to north. Sacrificial priests (blotmenn) and seething mages (seidmenn) incited the population to resist the new creed. A connection between Finnish and Nordic sorcery was demonstrated by Golther. Harald Harfagri, for instance, was married to Snafrid, the daughter of the Finnish king Svasi; their son was Rognwald, a 'seidman who came after his mother', and their descendant the sorcerer Eywind Kelda, who, with a group of seidmages, tried to resist King Olaf Tryggvason, who forced Christianity on the population. According to the *Fornmanna Sogur*, Harald Harfagri had his own son Rognwald and some eighty seidmages executed by his other son Firik, who burned the lot of them.

Throughout the medieval ages, Finnish sorcerers were famed for their skills in the arts of weather making, magic fog-casting, shooting sorcery arrows, foretelling the future, finding lost things or making furs iron-proof. These arts were practised by the Sami, the people who migrated with their reindeer across northern Scandinavia, and whose

noida worked shamanic rites with drums and incantations. In the old days the sorceries of the noida could be bought, a custom that became so popular in christianised Scandinavia that Norwegian laws of 1120 explicitly prohibited travel to the Finmark. Even the Christian king Olaf is said to have consulted noida, and when King Olaf fought Thorir Hund at the Battle of Stiklastad, it was Thorir who won, as King Olaf couldn't pierce the iron-proof reindeer hides that Thorir had bought in the Finmark.

We will explore some of the methods of the Sami-sorcerers in the next chapter. Observant readers will have noticed that, though there was lots of variety to Seidr rites, there is little hard evidence on the question of whether the seid-mages shook. The term 'argr', though full of useful suggestions, is not quite enough to support my hypothesis, even though there may be a connection between the metaphor of seething fluids and the tremors that shake so many shamans. A fascinating piece of information comes from Herwig Wolfram's *Geschichte der Goten* (1979). He mentions the word 'skohsl', which means a) one who 'goes around', possibly a spirit, and b) one who dances strangely while shaking and trembling. Wolfram claims that skohsl is the one and only word the Goths assimilated from the Slavic people, and suspects that this custom (a dance of demons?) may have come from the same source. Be that as it may, the existence of the Skohsl-dance is a sign that there were people in the Pagan north who used shaking for ritual.



9 Spells of Suomi

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, there are some indications that the seidr rites were influenced by the shamanic traditions of Finland. For several centuries, Finnish sorcery was famous and feared in northern Europe. People used to travel to the Finmark to buy spells and talismans. It is fairly well attested that Finnish wizards used to sell wind to sailors. Usually the wind was knotted into a piece of rope. If the customer opened one knot, a moderate sailing wind appeared. Two knots opened at once released a howling gale, and three knots at once produced a death-dealing storm. Frazer tells us that the people of Estonia believed that the sorcerers from Lapland could send out deadly storms. He quotes the lines:

Wild wailing wind of misfortune and sorrow,
Wizards of Finland ride by on the blast.

As we will see later on, the noida-'shamans' of the polar circle enjoyed a sinister reputation in most of ancient Europe. First, however, let's have a bit of ethnology. If we wish to examine the magical traditions of Finland, we should first consider that we are dealing with several cultures at once. The whole north of Scandinavia, as well as some bits of the former USSR, are the home of a culture that calls itself Sami, that is 'people of moorland and swamp'. The Sami originated in the Uralian cultures of central Asia. They have lived around the polar circle for at least 2000 years, where they developed their own distinct

98 Spells of Suorni

culture. In the old days, their country used to be much bigger than today. Sami travelled south to the tip of Oslo into the Viking era. To simplify matters, one might say that there are two basic varieties of Sami people. The mountain-Sami move with their reindeer herds across the open tundra. They live in tents, in winter they build tent villages. The forest-Sami live on forest reindeer, and have developed a semi-nomadic lifestyle which may include a bit of farming and fishing from time to time. Old literature generally terms the Sami 'Finns' and calls their country Sameoednam by the name 'Finnmark'. Tacitus called them 'Fenni' and recorded that they are poor people without weapons, horses or fixed abodes. By the 12th century, the term 'Lapps' was commonly used in Europe; it is not a kind term and the Sami do not like to hear it. The Vikings had an interesting idea about the origin of the word Sami. As the *Edda* describes, the giant lady Skadi married the god of the oceans, Njord. Now Skadi is a deity with a strong 'Finnish flavour'. She dwells in the desolate mountains of the north where wolves howl and mosquitoes fly, she gives good luck to hunters and is said to have invented snow-shoes, ski and the art of ice-skating. It seems that the Sami invented skiing, as can be seen from the 200 prehistoric skis found in their country - older than any of the skis found further south. According to a little known section of the *Ynglinga saga*, written in far-away Iceland by dear old Snorri, Skadi and Njord were not happy with each other. They had a divorce, and before long Skadi took Odin, the lord of Asgard, as her mate. The two had a son called Samig, who was the ancestor of the Sami. Eyvind of Hæleygjatal (quoted by Golther) supports this tale in a mumbling, almost senile fashion:

Saemig was conceived by the ancestor of the Aesir and the giant lady, in the age when the friend of heroes and Skadi lived among mortals and the goddess of skating received many sons from Odin.

While the *Volsunga saga* names one Sigi as the son of Odin and Skadi, Golther mentions that Jarl Hakon the Rich (970-995), who came from northern Norway, called on Saming as his ancestor. This indicates

that to the Vikings, the Sami people came from a semi-divine origin; an Opinion which was not shared by the rest of Europe, which saw the Sami AS an almost devilish breed. This may be due to the fact that among the Sami a form of shamanism was practised. Certain individuals, called noide or noaida had a shamanic function in their society, and were consulted for healings, exorcisms, divination, consultation of the ancestors, sacrificial ceremonies or the odd job, such as finding lost reindeer. Many of the noide enjoyed a sinister reputation, which may have been good for conducting business with strangers. They were notoriously secretive about their art and famed for glammers, delusions, miracle-working and extensive journeys in the otherworlds. Of course such practises were nothing unusual in ancient pagan Europe, and can be traced in Celtic and Germanic magic up to the Christian era. Then, however, most shamanic practises came to a swift and violent end. Most of Europe was Christian before missionaries dared to brave the Arctic wilderness, and this explains why such sorceries were still in vogue in the northlands when the rest of Europe was already following the path of the sheep. What is so special to the spells of the noide is the fact that they survived in spite of all missionary effort. The southern neighbours of the Sami are all from different cultures. In Norway and Sweden, a certain cultural exchange took place. The Nordic gods Ullr and Skadi are both strongly influenced by the Sami, while the 'queen of the dead' known to some Sami was strongly influenced by the Nordic death-goddess Hel. In Finland or Suomi, cultures merged which came mainly from central Asia and Siberia. The Finno-Ugric culture south of Samiland is quite distinct from the Sami (to demolish a common bit of prejudice) and both of them have very distinct forms of song and sorcery. First I would like to examine a few points of noide shamanism, and then continue with the Finno-ugric traditions, as they are reflected in the *Kalevala*. To give you an idea of the reputation of Lappland-sorcery I would like to quote a few passages from the second part of the *History of Dr. Johannis Faust*, that is, the fictional history of his disciple Christoph Wagner (1593). While Dr. Faust was (in all probability) a historical person, Wagner was an invention of the (anonymous)

100 Spells of Suomi

author of the famous first Faust book. The Wagner book is a bizarre compendium of odd facts and superstitions, including stolen goods from half a dozen grimoires. It includes a long chapter on the journey of Christoph Wagner to the wizards of Lappland, where he sought to find a cure for a damaged eye, which sums up a lot of popular beliefs. To begin with, Wagner's personal devil informs us:

That there are so many sorcerers in Lappland that they fill the entire country ... they are of the same race as the spirits themselves,

which explains why they exceed all the nations of the earth in wizardry, and in such skills as flying through the air and walking on water. Wagner soon learned that the Lappish wizards dwell at the frozen ocean and that 'in this land the people are like the Devil himself. Not a friendly description, but let us continue. The Wagner book describes some of the ritual customs of those sorcerers. The Lapps, we hear, adore stone and wood as if it were god. To placate their deities:

They have a copper drum with painted pictures of wild animals, birds and fish which they can catch easily. They also have an iron frog which is fixed to an iron rod. They set up the rod in the drum so it rears above it. Then they chant their conjurations and beat the drum, the frog falls down due to the impact and falls on one of the painted animals. Whichever it is that was pointed out they take it, slaughter it and sacrifice it to the gods. They hang up the head in a tree they consider sacred; they cook the rest, invite guests, devour it and pour the soup over each other...

Which goes to show that sacrifices can be fun. Questionable as some of the details are, the descriptions do contain a core of relevant information. The shamans of the Finnmark use drums for the seances, as was first recorded in the twelve century. These drums are remarkable for their ovoid shape (which produces interesting overtones) and for their relatively small size. Most of the old drums were 20-30cm in diameter (with a notable exception measuring 85cm across), which is much smaller than the huge drums found in some Siberian cultures.

Now such a Siberian shaman's drum often measures 70cm or more, and produces a very deep bass sound, if it sounds at all. Drum skins react strongly to climate, and the bigger the skin, the more will it 'work'. Siberian drums often have distorted frames due to the power of the skin. To make them playable, such drums have to be heated at the fireside for up to six hours, which requires patience and great care. To heat such a drum too swiftly can break the frame or split the skin, events which might prove deadly for the shaman whose drum it is. Several Siberian cultures believe that a shaman has the same life-expectation as his/her drum.

Smaller drums, such as those found among the noide (shamans) of the Finnmark sound much higher and sharper by comparison. They are usually played with a heavy T-shaped beater, which is made out of reindeer antlers. The noide drums usually have a reindeer skin. Like the Siberian drums, the noide drums are painted. For this purpose alder bark, twigs and leaves were boiled into a colour which can range from gold-yellow to red-brown, depending on the thickness of the broth. Using this essence, the noide used to paint scores of symbols on their drum skins, many more than are commonly found on Siberian drums. The noide symbols are highly abstract. They include gods, spirits, humans, domestic and wild animals, houses, camps, trees, rivers, mountains, ships, sledges, otherworldly places and, as a recent addition, even churches. Often in the centre of the drum is an abstract image of the world-tree, which tends to look like a large cross. This figure divides the drumskin into four quarters, each with its own distinct meaning. Many of these images are similar to the pictures found in the pre-historical rock-art of the polar circle.

For divination, the noide used to hold the drum horizontally. The client posed a question, and a bone-pointer was placed on the drum skin. Beating the drum (gently), the pointer leaped and slid across the skin, and indicated various symbols in its passage. These signs constituted the basic material of the answer. This is not far from the description given in the Wagner book. Another rite attributed to the wizards of Lappland was astral projection, that is, the ability to send out

102 Spells of Suomi

the soul on a trance-journey, be it in human or animal shape. Such travels are a common element in nearly all 'shamanic' cultures. The Wagner book claims that such journeys were made when a client consulted a sorcerer with the aim of learning news of distant places:

When the conjurer or devil-banisher has spoken with the gods and has completed the appropriate ceremonies, he falls to the earth and is dead, even as if he had died and his soul had left him... others have to remain with him to guard the dead body; if this is omitted the devils come to take him and carry him away. When 24 hours are past, life returns to him, the dead body begins to move and wakes with a sigh, as if he would arise from a deep sleep ... and answers all he may be asked.

The wizards took care to recall some details from the place they had visited, to give firm proof that they had really been there.

Prior to Christianisation, the people of Finland enjoyed what is generally called 'an animistic religion', which means that their world-view was as full of spirits and semi-divine beings as was the world view of most other north European nations. Agricola, the famous church reformer, rhymed an introduction to the deities of Finland in 1551 which contains several deities with rather similar functions. Ukko, for instance (from 'unkonen = thunder') was a god of weather and thunderstorms. His festival was sometime in spring, when sacrifices to him were offered in birch bark bushels. Agricola wrote:

And when the seeds of spring were sown
People drank to Ukko's health
They sought out Ukko's bushel
Women and girls got drunk
And shameful deeds were done
Which could be seen and heard.

Rather similar is the function of the west-Finnish deity Ilmarinen. Agricola wrote that he 'made fair weather and wind and furthered the

passage of travellers' (i.e. sailors). 'Ilma' is the root of such words as 'air', 'weather', in earlier times of 'heaven, air and storm'. Among the Wotjaken he is called Inmar. Some of the old songs call Ilmarinen the inventor of fire and the ruler of lightning. The two deities, Ukko and Ilmarinen made their way from folk-worship to the pages of the *Kalevala*. Lonnrot turned Ukko, the hammer-wielder, into a 'lord of the gods' that comes close to Christian monotheism, and made a divine smith out of Ilmarinen. Another heavenly deity, the god Jumala, derives his name from 'Jumo' meaning 'heaven'. Fromm compares the word 'Jumo' with Sanskrit 'Dyuman' = 'bright, glowing' and proposes that the Nordic Ymir and the Indo-Iranian Yima, as well as the Indian Yama might be related. Each of them functions as an ancestor (of sorts). The common, Indo-European root, implies androgyny or a double nature.

The famous Vainamoinen, oldest of singers and spell crafters, seems to have been a deity of the waters, before Lonnrot turned him into one of the three heroes of the *Kalevala*. 'Vaina' signifies a river that flows peacefully. Vainamoinen was popularly known as the inventor of the 'kantele', a zither-like instrument. Some hunter songs invoked him, and asked the deity to use the kantele to lure the birds and beasts of the forest to the hunters. Many of the old deities of Finland show remarkable agricultural elements. Agricola mentions 'Pellonpekko', who lets the barley grow, and 'Virokannas', who is in charge of the growing oats. 'The Sons of Kalev', Agricola wrote, 'cut the meadows and other things'. Now Kalev himself was a violent giant with magical powers, whom Lonnrot saw as the very ancestor of the Finnish people. His sons are 'culture-heroes', in that the songs claim that they chopped down the old forest to win land for agriculture. The Luonnottaret were a popular trinity. They were three maidens, comparable with the norns, who dwelled at the edge of the sky, at the very navel of heaven. This associates them with the *axis mundi*, the world tree and the cold bright splendour of the pole star. Among the water spirits, Ahti seems to have been most popular in ancient Finland. Agricola noted 'and Ahti brought fish out of the water', which makes him a special friend of the fishers, a deity of no small importance in the land of the thousand lakes. Ahti

104 Spells of Suorni

was occasionally called Vellamo (from 'to make waves, to churn'); some old songs name Vellamo as a son or daughter of Ahti. Lonnrot included Vellamo as a wife of Ahti in the *Kalevala*. You may find the name Ahti as a title of Lemminkaainen in the *Kalevala*, which is rather confusing, as the two deities have very little in common. Lemminkainen is a half-divine figure, a light-hearted and careless youth found in numerous Karelian songs dealing with the quest for the *sampo*, and with the myths of death, dismemberment, and eventual rebirth. Lemminkainen occasionally behaves as if he were a close cousin of *Loki*, and indeed his name comes from Finnish *Lempi*, meaning life, fire and flame. An interesting problem of mythology comes from the nature of the Kaves. In Agricola's commentary, we learn that 'the Kaves ate the moon away'. Ganander explains 'Kave' as 'the beast of the forest', which led to the scholarly hypothesis that the Kave(s) might be creatures like the monstrous wolves who devour sun and moon in Icelandic mythology. The Kave(s) of the songs are very different entities. They appear as feminine creation-spirits, as mother figures, as maidens of the otherworlds, and occasionally as male spirits as well.

A minor forest spirit was Nyyrikki. Agricola called him Nyrckes and wrote that 'he gives squirrels in the forest'. The name may come from a root meaning 'to skin'. More important was Hiisi, the spirit of the deep forest known to the cultures of east Finland. The name 'Hiisi' describes a dangerous location in the deep forest, or the personification of it. It also means 'bush, grove', which may refer to the sacred groves of Finland, which were places of worship, sacrifice and burial. Agricola wrote that Hiisi rules the beasts in the woods. Many songs name Hiisi as a creature of evil. We can observe a strong Christian element in this custom, as the Christian missionaries used Hiisi's name as a synonym for their devil. In west Finland, the lord of the forest was known as Tapio. Agricola stated that 'Tapio gives game in the woods' which makes him a deity of the hunters. Mielikki, as the wife of Tapio, was the lady of the forest. Common song traditions name her as the keeper of the keys to Tapio's barn. Now the god of the wild forest has no barn, the forest itself being god and barn as well. It seems interesting that such

agricultural concepts as 'barns' are used to describe a wild wood entity. In the same vein, the wild beasts were often called 'the herds of Tapio'. 'Tapio's table' was a tree of unusual form. Hunters made use of it by placing sacrificial offerings on the rough bark. In those centuries when furs from Finland brought record prices, the hunters gave thanks for their wealth by placing gold and silver on Tapio's table. (Fromm)

While many of the deities of the Finnish people can be traced in songs and myths of unknown age, the deities of the Sami are even more elusive. The Wagner book mentions that the Sami people 'adore wood and rock as if they were god.' In practice, this means that the Sami believed in a variety of nature spirits which were known to dwell in certain holy places. Most Sami sanctuaries, called Seite, were under the open sky. An interesting exception is a sacrificial cave on Ukonsaari island. Excavations unearthed antlers, animal bones and teeth. Around the cave entrance was a half circle of reindeer antlers. Some spirits could indwell sacred trees or secluded groves. There are several huge rocks in the north of Scandinavia which were venerated by the Sami. Inari lake was one of their holy sanctuaries, and the island Ukonkivi (God's rock) a place they used for sacrificial ceremonies from times immemorial. Likewise, Mount Saana was a place of worship, as was Mount Ailigas, with the Luomustijarvi, the 'lake of creation' nearby. The Skolt-Sami believe that the northern lights, the *aurora borealis*, erupting in the long winter night and weaving veils of luminescence across the firmament, are signs and appearances of their ancestors. Central to the religion of the Sami was the veneration of Beaivi, the life-giving sun. A solar symbol, such as a circle with a square in its centre can be found in the middle of many Noida drums. Bear worship was as common among the Sami as among their Finnish neighbours, and bear-hunting a ritual practice requiring the sorcerous help of the noida as well as three days of strict sexual abstinence. Bear claws and teeth are commonly found amulets in Finnish graves. The Wagner book makes mention of the manifold spirits of Lappland and states:

There is among them a great and mighty mob of spirits, who

106 Spells of Suorni

commune with them, eat and drink, also speak and walk with them, and these cannot be exorcised or chased away.

In spite of this 'plague of spirits', Christoph Wagner did travel to Lappland, and presumably he did find a cure for his crippled eye among the sorcerers of the northland. The 'historia' refrains from giving us details, but mentions that Wagner left after four or five days for sunny Italy, possibly as it was all a bit too much for him. No doubt the 'mob of spirits' and the glamour of the noide-sorcerers were worse than all his own devils could throw at him. Sami belief includes not only Gods such as the thunder deities Horagalles and Tierness, but also the Guv itar (the underworldly ones), the Jabmek (the spirits of the dead, many of which were friendly to the noida), the Jettanas (giants, from Nordic 'Jotun'), but also terrible 'wild men' such as the dreaded spirit Stallo. who likes to devour or petrify people.

It seems likely that the Noide will need their glamour and their secrecy to survive into the 21 st century. The Sami people, who used to live by travelling with their reindeer herds in a semi-nomadic fashion, have suffered much from modernisation, politics, frontiers and nuclear fall-out. Their environment is as threatened as is their way of life. It would be a great loss to the world if their unique style of shamanism would disappear. Finnish sorcery traditions may remind you of the *Kalevala*. Now the *Kalevala* is not very much concerned with the sorceries of the Sami people. Instead, it can be considered as a magnificent blend of myths and songs of half a dozen countries, and where figures from the Finnmark appear, these are often dark entities. Louhi, the lady of the northland, is a striking example. Portrayed as a deadly sorceress, Louhi is often busy with spells of cold and destruction. In one song she even gives birth to the spirit of frost and ice to have her revenge on the people of the southlands.

Sorcerous elements, though not of the Noidic kind, occur very frequently in the *Kalevala*, as do references to monstrous entities. Before considering these, I would like to comment on the way the *Kalevala* was compiled. The *Kalevala* has been called 'the ancient epic

of the Finnish people' by its compiler Elias Lonnrot (1802-1884), who was a physician and a passionate collector of folkloristic material. On his numerous travels across Finland, Lonnrot met a number of aged singers, and recorded their songs. These singers may be compared to the skalds and bards of the German and Celtic cultures in that they were custodians of the wisdom of their culture. Archipa Pertunen, for instance, claimed at the age of 80 that he has memorised 1152 songs, and that Laren Paraske, who was one of the famed singing ladies of Finland, with her 800 songs could not compare with him. Such feats of memory were by no means unique, though even in Lonnrot's time, the great singing tradition was gradually dying out. These songs fulfilled a variety of functions. Some told stories or semi-historical incidents. Others included elements of old religious lore or were intended for practical magic - cursing an enemy, healing a wound, placating the spirit of a slain bear and so on. Lonnrot collected all songs that he could listen to. Had he been an ethnologist of our age, he would have published the songs as they were, together with a massive amount of footnotes and commentaries. Lonnrot, however, was a romantic soul who saw the song material not as a heterogeneous mixture but who believed that sometime in pre-history, all the songs had been part of a single epic, the 'national epic of Karelia and Finland'. The 'reconstruction' of this national epic became his life-obsession, and infected a number of his friends as well.

The first, unpublished version of the *Kalevala* was complete in 1833. Lonnrot had arranged the songs he had in 16 chapters, 5000 verses altogether. Then he met other singers, so that the first published version (1835) contained 12000 verses, arranged in 32 chapters. This version included so much new material that Ldnrot had to change the order of events for congruence's sake. The version of the *Kalevala* you see in bookshops today was complete in 1849. It contains 22795 verses, arranged in 50 chapters, which were called 'runes' as a 'rune' is a song in Finland. The material that was blended for this work is more massive than most people assume. According to H. Fromm (1967), 4700 song variations were collected in north Karelia (c. 200,000 verses), 9000

108 Spells of Suorni

song variations in east and north east Karelia (c. 250,000 verses), plus some 15000 variations from Estland and Ingermanland (c. 400,000 verses). This means that Lonnrot had dozens of different versions for each popular song, often involving different heroes, incidents and outcomes. The first chapter of the book is a useful example. In it, we read a charming creation tale. The daughter of the air descends into the sea, where she floats happily, and becomes the mother of the waters. A duck builds a nest on her knee, and lays eggs. Out of the eggs emerge earth, heaven, sun, moon and clouds. Then the water mother creates the shores, the islands, the countryside until she gives birth to the primal singer Vainamoinen. Emerging from her womb he falls into the sea, and floats aimlessly in the water for ages. This story does not occur in the earlier versions of the *Kalevala*. Lonnrot developed it out of another tale, which describes a magical battle between Vainamoinen and an evil sorcerer. In that story, Vainamoinen enchanted his opponent who, being a bad loser, shot Vainamoinen in the back so that the old singer fell into the sea and floated around helplessly. This is the source that Lonnrot got his 'floating Vainamoinen' from which, mind you, has nothing to do with the creation tale. The duel was incorporated in Chapter 3, the floating 'abyss' scene in Chapters 6 and 7 in the final version of the *Kalevala*. As it turns out, the first chapter of the *Kalevala* blended items that originated in Estland, Ingermanland, south Karelia, Savo, east Karelia and a few other places. Some of these songs included Vainamoinen. Others described the daughter of the air, and others supplied the story of the duck. None of them includes all three elements. Though nearly all verses in this chapter are original song material, their blend and arrangement is entirely new and artificial. It seems that Lonnrot wanted to begin his 'national epic' with a creation story. The model he used for this purpose was the *Bible* with its '*Genesis*'. The same sort of creative editing was applied to most parts of the *Kalevala*. Over the years, Lonnrot collected scores of different sampo songs. The sampo is one of those riddles that defy interpretation. It could be described as the wonder-mill that produces wealth, and compared with a cauldron that feeds all, or the Holy Grail. 'Making the sampo' is a task

that most gods of ancient Finland were busy with in one legend or another, but Lonnrot wanted one god for the job only, and deleted a wealth of interesting alternatives. Likewise, it has to be mentioned that many of the songs involved Christian elements. While he was busy getting Christian names and ideas out of his epic, he kept much of the belief structure intact, and replaced Christian monotheism with a totally artificial Finnish monotheism. This seemed natural to him, but is considered absurd by modern researchers. Then there are the folk songs. Lonnrot loved the popular songs, such as 'The Suicidal Girl', and forced them into his epic even though they have nothing to do with the myths of the gods that he was trying to reconstruct. I find it a bit suspicious that all of Lonnrot's deities have trouble with women and would like to pose the question if this part of the epic reflects his private life. The confusion that Lonnrot produced by blending various Finnish deities has already been mentioned. This may be acceptable in a work of art but it certainly makes lousy mythology.

Other interesting issues are the sorcery chants. It is characteristic of these that many of them came in two parts. The first part describes the origin of some evil (such as a wound that refuses to close) while the second turns the evil into good. The sorcerer needed both parts to work the healing or the spell, as each part in itself was not sufficient. In recording such songs, Lonnrot noticed that he was often given only half of the chant, and that he had to put fragments together to understand the whole. Evidently some singers were shy about revealing the whole spell in one go. In each case the knowledge of the origin was needed to make the spell work. Such sorcery chants were whispered, spoken or sung. At crucial (and dramatic) moments the sorcerer used to increase the tempo of the words and become ever faster. Porthan, mentioned by Fromm, observed that in their excitement, the spell-crafters used to stamp on the ground, to blow air and to spit.

Incidentally, the spells given in the *Kalevala* are much more voluminous than in their original songs. Lonnrot wanted to glue as many versions together as he could, and was criticised by his contemporaries for indulging in so much 'superstitious' material.

110 Spells of Suorni

Epic and mythological songs used to be chanted at festivities and ceremonial occasions. For this purpose, the leading singer used to select a companion. The two sat down, cross-legged on a wooden bench. Either they sat side by side and held hands or they sat facing each other, so close that they could hold hands and that their knees were firmly touching. Before beginning the song, the two used to 'build up power' by breathing and swaying in rhythm. The swaying continued all the way through the song, which makes it likely that the performers remembered, and acted, in some gentle trance state. Swaying also used to be part of Finnish shamanism, which required the sorcerers to sway with increasing wildness until excitement and convulsive shaking set in. (Fromm). Porthan (1778) describes the singers' swaying as a slow and measured motion 'as if they wanted to bring their heads together' and states that the singers liked to sit while chanting, with a big mug of beer right next to them.

Swaying emphasises rhythm, and indeed the ancient songs of Finland were composed in a highly rhythmical form. Most of them make use of an eight-syllable metre for each verse. Staff-rhymes (alliteration) are liberally used, but without the strict rules and regulations that characterise the north Germanic staff-rhyme, and end-rhymes are avoided. The result is an easily flowing poetry. Verse follows verse, like waves coming to the shore, in a continuous, steady pulsation. As an example I would like to quote some lines from the 26th chapter, which describe how the light-hearted hero Lemminkainen meets a serpent.

... serpent, black beneath the soil; worm in colours of tuoni,
coloured like the earth and heather; richest rainbow colours glowing!
Pass the wanderer on his passage, move from him who is in motion
Let the wanderer journey freely, Lemminkainen walking lightly
to the northlands' greatest feasting, feeding all the highly-born.
See, the ghostly worm is moving, 'hundred-eye' is sliding swiftly,
turns around the twisting serpent, slips away into the wayside.
May the wanderer journey freely, Lemminkainen walking lightly
to the northlands' greatest feasting, to the secret celebration ...

The first verses of this sample were part of a serpent spell, the latter part describes how the spell is efficient and protects the traveller. In the public performance of such songs, the lead singer chanted the first verse. At the end of the verse (usually three syllables from the end) the supporting singer guessed the last bit. Then the supporting singer repeated the first verse, which gave the lead singer a chance to invent the next verse. At the end of the repetition, the lead singer joined in, and continued with the next line. This way, each verse was repeated twice. Occasionally the supporting singer was replaced with a zither-like instrument, the kantele. The kantele is a highly popular instrument in Finland and the countries around the Baltic. When Lonnrot collected his songs, he noted that in each house he found a kantele hanging from the wall. Now the modern kantele, with soundbox and more than a dozen metal strings is a fairly refined instrument. The older types were much simpler. Lonnrot collected several songs which detailed how the first kantele was made. In most versions, the ancient seer Vainamoinen comes upon a giant pike, which he catches or finds dead on the shore. Making use of the jawbones of this monster fish, and binding women's hair from tooth to tooth, the old sorcerer created the first kantele. Alternatively, finger bones were used as tuning pegs. As the songs tell us, the music that emerged from this macabre instrument was so sweet that all animals came to listen, and its creator began to weep with joy.

Archaeology reveals that the first (known) kanteles were simply planks of wood. Nordic birch or pine were commonly used, as they resonate well. Sometimes these planks were slightly hollowed in the middle, which is as far as their technical refinement went, and five strings (made of hair) were strung across. These were probably tuned to suit the minor scales that most songs were performed in, one possible scale being G-A-A[#]-C-D. A pentatonic scale, as popular with so many old cultures, is another distinct possibility.

While the Sami people of the Finnmark are well known for the use of frame drums for shamanism, the cultures south of them occasionally made use of the kantele for the same purpose. This is particularly documented among the Wogul and East-Jaken people. As a close

112 Spells of Suorni

parallel, there are a few central Asian cultures that used the Balalaika (a three-stringed lute) for shamanic seances. The Samojedes, the Chanten, the Mansen and the Kirgisian people of central Siberia had a similar custom. Instead of a drum, their shamans made use of a bow, which was sounded by striking the string with an arrow or a thin rod. Among these, and other Ugric cultures, shamans used to 'ride their bows' to the otherworlds long before drums were known (see Stolz, 1988).

Kalevala. A parallel legend from the Samojedic people claims that the singer Itje was the inventor of this instrument. Playing his first song, Itje was amazed to hear the voices of the beasts emerging from the strings. So were the beasts, who heard the call of the kantele, and felt compelled to follow the music. Itje played until all the beasts had assembled around him. Finally, a monstrous fish (or whale) emerged from the ocean. Itje called it to the shore. Playing continuously, he mounted the fish and travelled away. Five stringed harps also appeared in the 'shamanism' of the Celtic and Germanic cultures. The people of northern Europe played harps, as was first noted by Hekateus in the sixth century BC, quoted by Diodor, II, 47. Speaking of the Hyperboreans ('those who live beyond the north wind'), that is, the people of Britain or Scandinavia, he claimed that the inhabitants ought to be considered as priests of Apollo, as they praise him every day with song and zither music as they sit in the god's sanctuary. Hekateus described this sanctuary as a sacred grove, and mentions a temple-space designed in the image of the spheres. At this time, the heavens were thought to consist of a series of spheres, each of them containing some item of celestial furniture. Could his account refer to some megalith temple, such as a henge monument or a troymaze (labyrinth)?

Now the harps of the early Celts and Germans were quite unlike what you would call a harp today. What is so commonly called a Celtic harp is a comparatively new instrument, the oldest known example being an Irish harp of the 15th or 16th century. The older types were much simpler, more robust, and easy to carry on a journey. They had a

rectangular shape and featured four, five or even six strings. Most researchers assume that these were tuned to a pentatonic scale. With a six string 'kithara' 'chrotta' or 'crwth' you would get five tones to the octave, and a further string, sometimes of a different material, to accompany them. The strings were probably made of gut, but metal is also possible. The art of wire-making was known in central Europe before the Romans came and conquered. Pentatonic scales are well known from a number of ancient cultures. The old Chinese began their scale with an F (of sorts) which they called 'the sound of the golden bell', and continued with F-G-A-C-D. Legend states that the F was chosen as a basic sound as it is neutral - it 'neither excites nor soothes too much'. The Japanese had very similar scales, and the same can be observed in the early Greek types of music. The oldest Greek lyre was not very unlike a crwth or a kantele, and Orpheus, just like Itje and Vainamoinen, found that all beasts responded to the call. It was probably the beast-spirits, not the actual beasts of the countryside who were charmed by the sound of the strings.

Of course we cannot be sure what a Celtic or Germanic pentatonic scale may have sounded like, as we do not know the sound it began with. The earliest record on this point may come from Gerald of Wales, who noted that the Welsh people of the late 12th century favoured B^b, and began and ended their tunes with this sound. One possible pentatonic scale based on B^b would go B^b-C-E^b-F-G. This sounds lovely, though we should bear in mind that we have no idea what the B^b of Gerald's time sounded like.

Island-Celtic literature mentions the use of such simple lyres for a number of consciousness changing activities. Traditionally the bards were trained to excel in three different sorts of melody. One was the sad sort of tune which accompanies tragic songs, and which made all people weep. Another was the happy melody, which dried the tears and set the audience dancing on the tables. The third variety was so calm that it soothed all listeners to sleep. You find a similar notion in the *Kalevala*, chapter 42, which describes how Vainamoinen used his pike-and-hair kantele to play the northland wizards to sleep. I would also like to

114 Spells of Suorni

mention the use of harps and lyres for therapeutic purposes. The *Vita Merlini*, the biography of Merlin, is a lovely example. Merlin, as you may know, was a historical person, probably a king, who went insane during a battle and fled to the desolate forest of Celydon (Caledonia). In his isolation Merlin became a 'wild man' who ran with the animals, who fed on roots and prophesied his crazy visions to a wolf, a pig and an apple tree. When King Rhydderch, who had married Merlin's sister, heard of his relation's plight, he sent a bard into the forest to bring the madman to his senses. Merlin was haunting a mountaintop at the time where hazel bushes sheltered a hidden spring. The bard soon heard the madman's howl. Playing gently on his lyre, he lured Merlin out of the bushes and back to human consciousness. The tune attracted the 'wild man', while the words of the bard restored Merlin's human memory. Thanks to this subtle therapy, Merlin could return to the court where he soon became mad again.

Many shamanic systems make use of musical instruments to change the mind, be it of shaman, patient or audience. Most people think of drums in this respect, but drums are not the only instruments used for such purposes. Some shamanic systems do not use drums at all, but rely on other ancient instruments, such as scrapers, rattles, sound stones, bells, bull roarers, bows, click-sticks or the various forms of flutes and trumpets. What is common to practical shamanism is not any specific instrument, but the voice of the healer, be it as speech, prayer, song, chant, dialogue with the spirits or simple ecstatic howling. Voice, words and chaos-words, any bit of sing-song that makes no sense to your rational mind, are keys to the re-formation of consciousness and indeed, the magic of words appears in countless mythologies. Words structure thinking. When I first read the *Kalevala*, I found the persistent eight-syllable rhythm creeping through my brain until I noticed that I could think in it. Before long I practised prayer and self-hypnosis using eight-syllable rhythms, and found this a highly ecstatic activity. Would you like to give it a try? Read the *Kalevala*, if possible, loud, until you find the rhythm natural.

There is power in words, and enchantment. Celtic bards and fili spent

many years learning the entire vocabulary of their people. They were expected to explain the meaning and origin of any word, no matter how old or obscure, which produced a lot of questionable etymology (see Cormac's *Glossary* or the *Dindsenchas*). Words of power appear strongly in Finnish myths, and in this case they are usually words of origin. Lonnrot made use of several songs which told how the ancient seer Vainamoinen sought for the words of origin. Where can the singer come upon the dreams and beliefs of the great and remote beginning? First of all, Vainamoinen hunted and sacrificed a great number of reindeer, but found no words among them. Next, he sought to find them among the deceased in the land of the dead, beyond the Black River of Dissolution at the northern rim of the world (see chapter 14). Having returned from the dark land, somewhat wiser but without the sorcerous words of his desire, he sought out a herdsman for advice. This is not unusual for northern Europe, where the guardians of the herds, dwellers in solitude, were often thought to know mysterious secrets. 'Words of origin?' croons the old herdsman, and advises that old Vainamoinen ought to seek out the much older creature Antero Vipunen, whose mouth and belly contain thousands of spell-binding words. Such news were heart-warming for old Vaina. A treasure hoard of eldritch words but a mere three days journey away! Ilmarinen, the divine smith, cools Vainamoinen's enthusiasm somewhat:

Vipunen is long deceased, long has Antero been lost
 Binds no longer slings and nooses, sets no longer traps on trails...

But, no matter whether Vipunen be dead or alive, Vainamoinen is out to get the magic words from him. Who would Vipunen be? 'Antero' is a modern version to the name 'Andrew', meaning manly. Older is the name Vipunen, which means a noose trap (Vipu). Slings and nooses were often used for hunting in old Finland. Usually, they were connected with a counterweight, which pulled the game up into the air to strangle it at leisure. Some of these noose traps were so strong that they could slay a bear or a human being, and such lethal devices formed

116 Spells of Suorni

the root of the name Vipunen. It is the sling-trap which is lurking at the pathside, the hidden death concealed by snow and shrub.

Vipunen, however, is also what we may call a 'giant', using a mythological term, or an 'ancient one', using an expression coined by the New England writer H.P. Lovecraft. For three long days, Vainamoinen travelled wearily to come to his destination. The first day he walked on needlepoints, the second on sword points, the third across the sword blades of the greatest heroes. Such dangerous journeys, be they across weapon blades, poisonous serpents, ice-bridges or spider-strands, are a common element of shamanic otherworld-excursions. They show that the way to the otherworlds is beset with dangers, and have a way of exhausting and purifying the traveller. Arriving at his destination Vainamoinen finds Vipunen in a state far beyond ordinary life and death. Lonrot used some ten different song versions to assemble the Vipunen chapter, and as these versions show considerable variety, I would like to explore some of the alternatives. In one of the song versions, Vipunen rests asleep in the dark earth. Vegetation has grown all over his body, trees and shrubs conceal his face, a greenwood grove that hides the hidden dreamer. A striking parallel to this image comes from a more recent work, *The Book of the Forgotten Ones* which Sor. Nema received in Maat-consciousness:

Ye know *us* not, the growth has covered *us*.
Long have we been hidden from your sight.
Ye know not our names, nor natures,
And yet we are thine own.
Ye chant no invocations unto *us*,
Yet always are we manifest within thee.
We are the gods of hunger and becoming.
We pulse and grow between your heartbeats.
We are the pause in breathing,
Between the inhalation and the exhalation.
We live to devour and bring forth.
We live between the mind and madness.
We are the ghosts of the unborn...

These haunting lines refer to an order of entities which predates the dreams of gods and mortals. You can find such creatures, under such names as 'giants' 'ogres' and 'monsters' in most mythologies. It is a special characteristic of practical shamanism to seek out such primal entities and to learn the ancient wisdom from them directly. Think of the *Vafthrudnismal*, for instance, the song that tells how Odin challenged an ancient giant to a riddle contest, or the *Song of the Hyndla*, which has the love-goddess Freya evoke a dead giant-lady from her barrow. The next chapters will elaborate on this topic. To evoke (and awake) old Vipunen, Vainamoinen cuts down the trees and bushes which conceal the giant. Another song version states that Vipunen was woken when Vainamoinen struck the earth with his iron staff (a common gesture in Nordic necromancy), and as Lonnrot liked both, he glued them together. A third version, which reveals that Vipunen lies as a rotten corpse in corruption and putrefication, was deleted by him. Be that as it may, the dead giant opens his huge mouth and Vainamoinen (a) falls in (b) is devoured, and (c) leaps in voluntarily. Now follows one of the oldest and most popular themes in mythology: the sorcerer, inside the giant-monster, climbs through guts and cavities, explores tunnels and orifices, and finally forces the monster to submission by hurting it from inside. For this purpose, old Vaina sets up a smithy in his shirt, where he proceeds to heat and hammer until Vipunen howls with belly cramps. Screaming with pain and rage, Vipunen does his best to curse and banish the intruder. This took about two verses in the original songs, but Lonnrot saw it as a great opportunity to insert a lot of sorcery-song material, which had nothing to do with our tale, but was included for completeness sake. As a result, you find more than 170 verses of banishing and exorcistic intent in the Vipunen chapter, which may seem a little long-winded but is dramatic nevertheless. To no avail! The great old one cannot control the tiny godling who is wounding him from inside, and, admitting defeat, he 'opens the ark of his words' and reveals the wonders of the dawn ages. Satisfied, and many thousand words richer, Vainamoinen climbs out of the giant and gives a hearty 'good bye!' Actually, he should have thanked dear Lonnrot for this rich

118 Spells of Suorni

harvest, as in the original song-material the statement 'He received three words' is all the hearer learns.

Being devoured by a monster, and controlling the monster from inside, are common themes in shamanic mythology. They have found great popularity in folk tales, such as the story of Jonah and the whale or the rather similar adventures of Munchhausen. In essence they contain a key to the magick of the ancient ones, which requires the mage to dissolve her/his identity and to assume the shape and sentience of the chaos creature.

The Vipunen tale has a few variations which I would like to mention for completeness' sake. In one version, the heavenly smith Ilmarinen courts the daughter of the sinister northland goddess Louhi. After several ordeals, the old lady devours the smith, who forges a knife within her belly and cuts his way out. Another version does without Vipunen. In this tale we find Vainamoinen as the sleeping giant who wakes occasionally to devour passing travellers. Other songs feature the light-hearted Lemminkainen as the hero who is eaten by Vipunen; some go so far as to suggest that Vipunen is actually a parent of Lemminkainen. An Estlandic song claims that Lemminkainen's parents were sick in bed. Their disease lingered until their bed and their bodies began to rot and trees grew all over them. Behind this tale may be the old Finnish custom of burying the dead in sacred groves, or the Sami custom of wrapping the dead in birch bark.

What would you make out of these songs? Veiled by the myths a common knowledge is communicated. Many old cultures believed in the existence of monstrous ancient creatures, keepers of a primal wisdom, who were assumed to lie dead and dreaming in faraway places. These entities, as many a shaman and sorcerer knew from practise, could be woken, experienced and understood *from within*. Often enough, the seer and the sleeping old one were closely related with each other, so closely that we could consider them twin aspects of a common sentience. We will explore the subtle alignments between giants, gods and their worshippers in the chapters to come.

10 Introduction to the Practice

Before we come to the actual practice of shaking, I would like to emphasise a few important points. As you have seen in the last chapters, shaking has been used as a consciousness-changing technique by a number of cultures all over the globe. The belief structures of these cultures differ, and so do the experiences that arise from the practice. This makes seething, or shaking, a difficult matter to teach: we are not dealing with a single technique but with a wide field of varied experiences, many of which await proper exploration. If you choose to explore shaking for yourself you should consider that you are on your own. I won't be there to cheer you up or to warn you if you're overdoing it, which leaves the entire responsibility for what you do and what happens with you. All cultures who use shaking as a consciousness-changing technique treat it with great respect and care. In some cultures, the technique is learned with a teacher. In others, the spirits are expected to teach it to their chosen ones, and it is the fact that this is possible which inclines me to believe that they can teach it to you as well, provided this is your will. Let me emphasise that shaking is not for everyone. Shaking can change consciousness, but then there are countless methods of achieving the same end using other techniques. After all, any trance-technique is a convenience. It is meant to produce a certain consciousness, and this is what it's good for. People differ, and the technique that inspires one person may be useless for another. In magick, the important issue is the consciousness you enjoy, not the means to access it. Alas, in our day and age people tend to bedazzle themselves by confusing the package with the contents. Shaking seems

120 Introduction to Seething

an exotic package to many of the wilder mind-explorers, who can easily imagine how impressive it would look if they would shake, doing wild and shamanic things. Quite a few shamans (and spirit-mediums) shake and tremble while they do a healing or channel a message, but this does not mean that their consciousness is in any way better than before. It's only the attractive wrapping, which packages the event to the patient or the audience. Shaking can be used to change consciousness, but it does not automatically produce this effect. If you believe that you must learn shaking just because it looks so exotic and impressive, you may be fooling yourself. Shaking does not guarantee inspiration or ecstasy. To use it properly, you may require a measure of experience in trance practise as well as good communication with your deep mind (or the gods and spirits if you like), which is one reason why I call shaking a practise for *advanced* practitioners. Good seething requires a trained mind. It requires a trained body as well. A seething trance, involving wild trembling, heat, sweat, and the like, is in itself a highly skilled athletic activity. Imagine you wanted to take up mountaineering or diving as a sport. It would only be good sense to do so if you are healthy, fit, exercise every day and have your health checked once in a while. If you had heart problems, brain troubles, a weak physique or were pregnant, such activities wouldn't do you any good, and the same goes for shaking trances and the like. *It is your responsibility to estimate if you are healthy enough to experiment with shaking trances. If in doubt, go and consult a doctor.* Now I don't want to give you the impression that shaking is dangerous. It can be dangerous when practised unwisely and without caution. But then, the same goes for driving cars or working with machines. So far, I have not heard from anyone coming to harm through shaking, but as we all know, accidents can happen. Shaking is a relatively 'new' technique for modern people, meaning that if you use it, you are a pioneer. The greatest dangers with shaking might be what we could call result-orientation, stubborn determination, and fear of failure - in other words, plain egotistic stupidity. The attempt to force results is never good for body and mind, as it blinds us to feedback signals. Body and mind generally signal when we're overdoing

something, but it does take a measure of wisdom to watch out for such signals, and to respond to them. Thus, if you wish to explore the shaking trances, let me ask you to be gentle and considerate with yourself. Seething should never be forced. If it comes to be, you may enjoy what goes on, but if it doesn't, you should accept this decision of your deep mind and do something else. Maybe you'll find yourself shaking naturally at some other time, or discover that you can find access to the desired consciousness by means of some other trance technique.

11 Seething Practice

O. Preparation for the trance.

It can be useful to approach the experience of magical madness with a measure of prudence. Welcome to the 'common sense' section! First, you ought to create favourable conditions. You might start by arranging your room or ritual space in a way that seems attractive to you. This is a highly individual matter, as people require different stimuli to get going. Under which conditions do you visualise and do magick best? Do you prefer darkness, gloom, twilight, sunshine, candles or coloured lights to produce a suitable atmosphere? Next, see to it that you have lots of time and privacy. A busy schedule can inhibit free seething. You won't know how long you'll be seething during the first experiments, let alone whether you'll have an accurate sense of time during the trance. It is good to have time after the seething, to earth the excess energy, to balance body and mind. You will learn that the time after seething is one of the most open-minded and sensitive you can experience. You are wise if you use this magical time to remember and re-affirm what is vital to your will. It is not the proper time to hurry to a date or to have a quarrel with the landlord - best make sure that you have the leisure to 'come down' gently. Another consideration is air, clothing and temperature. Unless it's cold, the shudders will make you sweat. This is an important element in the alchemy and should be encouraged. Take care to wear light clothing, if any. Ritual costume is a splendid idea as long as it makes you energetic and excited. Avoid



124 Seething Practice

clothing that constrains your body, especially tight girdles, belts, narrow trousers or jackets that cramp the shoulders and neck. Your costume should be comfortable. Seething requires a lot of mobility and ease. Belly breathing, and free motion of knees, hips and shoulders are essential. If you wear glasses, as I do, take them off after you have warmed up. You will notice that your head moves with greater freedom once there is no risk your glasses might fly off. Sometimes I like to wear glasses while seething, as I enjoy the visual effects of the trance in the outer, but for the first experiments you make I would recommend you get rid of such inhibitions.

Maybe you would like to drink something during the trance. Keep some water (or whatever) nearby. Take care only to drink in small sips, as bigger amounts of fluid may churn around your belly. The same goes for food. Beware of seething with a full stomach! Small amounts of food are fine, but big amounts can cause belly aches, stitch and remarkable unease. If you have eaten too much, your seething will be somewhat restrained, meaning that parts of your anatomy will remain tense. The experienced seidmage will use only light quivering in such circumstances. How much food you can take before seething is a question you will answer for yourself. Personally, I do not recommend long seething sessions on an empty stomach. Too little nourishment may flaw the quality of your perception. You will find that seething is one of those trances that burns up a lot of calories. If you are too hungry, your blood-sugar level may drop, leading to symptoms such as exhaustion, weariness, worry and cramp. To prevent this, you could have a bottle of water nearby, into which you have dissolved a generous amount of fruit-sugar (dextrose). Take a sip from time to time. A bottle of fruit juice is a good alternative. Next, consider your bowels. Before you seethe, go to the toilet. It will save you a lot of annoyance later on. Seething with a full bladder is a remarkably unpleasant experience.

What else do you need? Would incense provide a further element of excitement? How about music? In the later chapters, you read how various cultures use music, chanting and instruments to aid seething trance. Background music can be very useful to produce a sense of

rhythm and pulsation. Get yourself some tapes with high-intensity voodoo drumming, especially the material that favours difficult rhythms, strong off-beat and a lot of madly chanting participants. Maya Deren's recordings (see bibliography) are an excellent example. I can also recommend the passionate seething music of Amodali and Patrick (*Mother Destruction*) who have done much to express the secrets of seidr in sound and sorcery. Another of my favourites is *Tangerine Dream* particularly *Ricochet*. If you want to amplify your own shuddering, tie sound elements to your costume. Many Siberian shamans decorate their ritual clothes with several kilos of bells, scrap metal and assorted rattles, which provide an intense sound-track to the lightest tremor. The San people of the Kalahari collect butterfly cocoons, fill them with tiny pebbles, string them up and tie them to their legs so that they rattle. You can make something similar for yourself. Simply use matchboxes in place of the cocoons, fill them with stones, tape them shut, string them up and there you are. Another good choice is a string of small bells, or even better, one of those scarves that oriental dancers use, with a lot of small tinkling coins dangling from the edges. I like to use two of these, one around the hips and one around the shoulders, to amplify the shudders as they come from above and below.

1. Everything ready?

All right, let us proceed to the warm-up ritual. This is the most difficult stage for the result-hungry, who would much rather hurry into the 'real magick' than concern themselves with such trifles as well-being and physical health. However, a good warm-up is an excellent start for seething. I would like to point out that seething is not just trance work but also a highly skilled physical activity, if not an athletic feat, and this means that you progress faster if you prepare properly. The best preparation is regular physical exercise, which ought to be part of the daily discipline of the magician. Seething can be a strain, if the trance

126 Seething Practice

is long or the shudders especially violent, harm is easily done to the body if the mind is busy elsewhere. A good dancer or martial artist wouldn't dream of doing difficult motions without a thorough warm-up. Neglecting to do a ten minute warm-up can mean a strained muscle or sinew which acts up for weeks, so do yourself a favour and work with your body, not against it. What can you do to warm up? The simplest approach would be to join a martial arts group for a while, which will teach you how to exercise your body very fully. As an alternative, I can offer a couple of recommended exercises. You could start by shaking your arms and legs. Then run on the spot, or jump on the spot for a while. Leap here and there, forward, sideways, backwards. Jump with your legs together and apart, jump on one leg, jump as if you would dance a jig. Getting warm already? Bounce on your toes. Then shake the tensions out of the muscles. Do stretching exercises. Reach for the skies. Touch the ground. Practise moving your hips. Move the pelvis sideways. Move it forward and back. Make big circles with your hips, then smaller ones, or circle your hips without moving the rest of your body. Practise copulation movements, slow and fast; these ease the genitals and make seething easier. Exercise your elbows, swing the arms in slow, big circles, loosen the shoulders, move your neck gently. Lift up your knees as high as you can, do sit-ups, push-ups, dance around, anything that makes you warm and flexible. Take a big lungfull of air, and feel the energy surging through your flesh. From time to time you could stand on one leg, shaking the other, and making it tremble, which will make the muscles loose and aglow. If you sweat a bit, you are doing fine. You could also turn on your tape recorder and dance enthusiastically for a quarter of an hour, which is something I can't recommend enough. Many shamans dance a while before doing strenuous trance work, and not all of them require music to do so. It is an interesting magical practice to learn dancing to imaginary music, or to almost inaudible 'chanting'. Often such action produces a lot of excitement and induces a trance state without conscious effort.

You will find that a good warm-up increases body awareness, feeling and pulsation, and allows the life-energy to flow through you

more freely. Exercise may help to ease the mind, to dissociate everyday problems, and to release accumulated tension in a playful fashion. For instance try to play the werewolf. The warm-up stage of your ritual IN also useful to find out how fit you are. If you find yourself exhausted while still warming up, better go gently on the seething. Seid-magick is a very powerful art, and people who approach it recklessly can do considerable harm to themselves. Your body will tell you when you ought to be more careful, and I hope you have the brains to listen to its message.

2. Would you prefer a light or deep seething trance for the beginning?

Do you want to go into trance straight-away or would you like to do it gradually? If you could guess what the spirits are thinking about you right now, you would laugh. How would you like to begin this practice? If you practise on your own, you might like to begin the trance with a bit of ritual. Banishing is always good practice to clear the mind and the atmosphere of undesirable influences. Once you have swept the negative influences out of your system, call to the spirits to come into your being, to fill the world with blessings, to help you explore the mysteries of seething. If you ask your deep mind and the spirits to teach seething to you, this may give them a chance to make seething magick a valuable skill for you. I say 'ask' as it is a request, not an order or a command. If you ask, you will be answered - and you will always get an answer, provided you keep the mind open enough to perceive it. Ask if your spirits/deep mind want you to explore seething now. If they agree, you'll find it easy indeed; if not, no amount of conscious struggle will work.

Now for your first seething experiment. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. The legs should be loose, the knees slightly bent. The posture ought to feel natural and relaxed. Simply stand. Are you

128 Seething Practice

comfortable? Are your knees and hips mobile? It is very easy to block seething by keeping the legs and hips tensed. Can you move your hips in circles? Can you belly-breathe freely? Excellent. What you want is a relaxed and easy posture, alive and mobile. Try this: send awareness into your feet. Imagine how they are rooted in the ground. Think of the great deep below. Imagine power arising from the deep. Imagine sheer energy surging upwards through your feet and legs. Can you allow your legs to tremble? Can you permit your knees to shake? What is it like when tremors move your hips? Explore the sensation. As a seidmage, you are the axis mundi, the tower of truth, the ancient tree that connects the worlds. As you span the gulf between the height and depth, your body begins to oscillate.

3. Begin by allowing your legs to tremble

Go gently, it's quite enough at first to explore a shuddering between feet, knees and hips. Quite probably, the shaking will begin in uneven bursts. Much depends on your attitude. You can force yourself to shake, using sheer strain and tension to get going, but you may find that you'll get much better effects when you relax so that you shake naturally. Seething is a very natural activity, and the less effort you require the better. In its best expression, you may find that the shaking comes most easily when you 'let go' into the pulsation, and allow your body to pulse as it will. As your legs shake, observe the sensation. It is quite typical that beginners shake in bursts, 'one leg trembling faster than the other' or 'the shaking pulse getting stronger and softer every other instant'. The first moments of seething can be full of pauses, interruptions, changes of speed and emphasis. The shudders may be gentle one moment, and wild the next, they may move parts of your body or jerk you around completely. A sudden jolt of power may lift you till you stand trembling on your toes, or maybe you will find your upper body swaying from side to side. All of these are fine. In this stage,

your sole job consists of allowing your legs to shake. After a while you will find that the tremors harmonise. Should you like to interrupt your shaking by dancing a few steps from time to time, do so.

4. Move the pulsation upwards

Once you are used to trembling legs, you may learn to move the pulsation upwards, from knees and hips into your belly, bottom and upper torso. This is a process of gradual heating. Go gently. Allow more of your body to participate in the shudders. You will notice that some parts of your anatomy shake more easily than others. Seething will gradually loosen such tensed areas, provided you relax and give yourself time. Do you enjoy the sensation? As the shuddering dissolves the knots of tension and frustration, you may find a warm glow radiating through your flesh, so that more and more of your body joins the pulse of the seething. I can't tell you how joyous it feels when a cramped, or 'armoured' part of the anatomy joins into the mutual impulse. In a way it's like coming apart, in another it's like coming home. As the shuddering spreads upwards, you may enjoy how one part of the body after another joins the fun. During this process, the rhythm and strength of the shaking will keep changing. Sometimes you'll pulse faster, sometimes slower, and often enough the impulse of shaking moves from one group of muscles to another. This is a good thing, as regular shaking at a fixed speed would necessarily strain parts of your body, while leaving others inert. Your heart, as an example, does its job of pulsing in a slightly irregular fashion. If your heart muscle worked like a machine, beating in exactly the same rhythm all your life through, it would soon show signs of wear, and your life would be significantly shorter. Variation is a key to endurance. Good seething is full of variety. Sometimes I feel the force rushing along my legs and flanks to the shoulders. At other times, it's the hips and belly which produce the impulse, or the hips and the behind, or the shoulders and head shaking

130 Seething Practice

to and fro. There are many ways to shake. If you want to shake for longer periods, you may have to use all of them.

5. Reduce pulsation

If you have done this for a while, try the following. *Reduce* the pulsation. The fire of enthusiasm can be dampened, the rhythm of the shudders can be calmed. Allow some of your power to flow into the earth. Reduce the shaking until it becomes a light quivering. How long can you continue at minimal quivering? Does the impulse wane after a while, requiring you to heat up again? What states of mind do you enjoy while doing minimal seething?

6. Increase again

Now that you have learned how to reduce the seething, you may perhaps like to *increase* it. Imagine vividly how the power surges through you. Go into the shudders and allow them to lead you. Don't stand still - allow the power to move you around. Now is the time to experiment. What ideas, images, symbols, spells or power-chants get you going and increase the pulsation? You will learn that the excitement of the mind in turn leads to excitement (shaking) in body, and vice versa.

It is the fire of excitement that keeps the cauldron hot and the broth seething. You can influence the excitement through imagination. You could combine seething with prayer or rhythmic invocation. Speaking faster, and with increasing intensity, and imagining vividly what you are speaking of may well help to get the body into trembling, and the mind into overdrive. How about chanting? You have one or more inner voices, presumably, so how about having them sing or chant for a change? You could start out by repeating a mantra or spell in your inner

voice, and then make it rhythmic as you go along. Try 'chaos words', meaningless sounds and words of alien tongues, words of barbarous power that roll and resonate, and awaken strange resonances in the depth of the mind. Who says that invocations have to please the conscious mind? Seething runs on excitement, and ranting in chaos language may wake ancient passions and atavisms. If you like to, you can amplify your inner chanting by moving the body congruently. You can also do the chanting in a whisper. Hissing, 'runing' and whispering has interesting effects on the mind. If you can chant yourself ecstatic being loud and wild you can also learn to do it in a whisper, or completely in the imagination. The trick lies in association, in going fully into the experience.

Loud singing is not that easy while doing seidr as it requires a measure of muscular control in belly and breast. On the other hand, the shudders do give a weird quality to the song, which can be useful for invocations of the ancient ones. I suggest you defer these experiments until you are well used to seething trances. Then there are visions. As you stand and shudder, can you imagine yourself as a cauldron? Think of the hard metal shell, think of the broth, think of the fire coming from below, alive with hunger, lust and rapture. You can make the fire wax and wane thereby influencing the intensity of your shaking.

Or try this method: As the pulse vibrates your body, think of the great deep. Down there, in rich and welcome darkness, a dragon lies sleeping. Imagine how it stirs, how it moves, how it wakes and opens its gleaming eyes. See it stretching, scales gleaming, as it spreads its wings and screams. Here is the dweller of the hidden realm! Imagine the earth-dragon, fire in its eyes, as it hurls itself upwards, ascending like a lambent flame, coming out of the dark, out of the earth, into your flesh and through your skull into the height. Up into the skies. Imagine the heavens. Beyond the stars, in total darkness, a huge form appears. Taking flesh out of the void, the sky dragon assembles. Comets gleam in its gaze, stars sparkle on its flanks, as it moves from absence to presence. Imagine the sky dragon as it turns its attention earthwards. Hear it roar and see its radiation as it flames up in celestial glory. In a

132 Seething Practice

blaze of brilliance it hurls itself down, out of the black, into the blue, and through the skies to you. In your flesh and around it, standing on the cross-roads between worlds, the dragons find their union in your ecstasy.

The dragon-vision is a dream that has proven useful to excite a lot of daring experimenters. Some find it so overwhelming that they find themselves staggering or leaping about. The cauldron-vision is not quite as extreme. People using it tend to be more stable and balanced, but should beware of becoming too static. There are many other visions that may get you going. Which thoughts and images excite you a lot? You may find it useful to call on your power beast/s while you shake. Becoming it/them will produce plenty of excitement, especially when it comes to instincts, obsessions, hungers and survival drives. Or would you prefer to assume a god-form, and to become obsessed by that deity? How about assuming the mask of your holy guardian angel? Are these choices sufficient? If you want more and better ones, ask your deep mind and the spirits now. As you experiment with these and other visions, you may notice that seething trances tend to improve the imagination considerably. You may find it easy to imagine with great vividness while you shake. What would you like to imagine vividly? Do yourself a favour and imagine something that is worth imagining. Otherwise, you might find yourself thinking all sorts of negative and counter-productive things, which is an interesting way of producing emotional upset. If you dream and imagine in your trance, dream of something worthwhile. Who knows - it might come true. This is part of the 'fate-binding' that can easily happen while seething. Vivid imagination during unusual states of consciousness may change the nature of reality as you believe it. Do you know the difference between dreams that help you do your will, and dreams that only 'bring you down'? In seething, you are very sensitive to imagination. The choice is yours. You will come out of the seething as you willed yourself to be.

In your first weeks of experiment, I would recommend that you only go into high-intensity shaking for a short time, followed by longer periods of moderate or reduced shaking. In the next chapter you may

read on various ways of shaking, and on the states of mind they are good for. High-intensity shaking, for example, is useful to produce a certain level of wildness, and to dissolve certain tensions and restrictions. For vision-seeing, astral journeys and time-travel, a moderate level of shaking is useful, which has body happily quivering without having to bother the conscious attention about it. Moderate shaking is efficient when you want to shake for long periods without undue strain. In those first experiments, you do well when you simply allow the seething to shake you at an enjoyable and easy rhythm. Enjoy the pulsations as they move you, heat up or cool down as you will. The good thing about learning magick is that you have lots of time. You don't have to learn and use it all at once. Once you begin with magick, you may find yourself learning and refining it through lifetimes. Instead of hurrying to the next achievement or success, you might as well enjoy what you are doing right now.

7. Bringing the rite to an end

When you feel that you have had enough, bring the rite to an end. Reduce your excitement and calm down. Give your thanks to all concerned, especially to your body, your mind, your spirits, guardian angels and subconscious self-aspects: they have done such a lot for you. Quite possibly there will be a lot of excess power once you come out of the seething trance. If you like to, you can give some of this power to your gods and spirits, who may put it to good use effecting changes in the inner and outer. Longer seething sessions can produce a 'field of energy' around and within you. For convenience sake, you might consider that 'energy outside' can be used by gods and spirits to change the world around you, while 'energy inside' may transform your thinking, believing, and improve your health. The gods and the spirits who actually do the job are of course equally within and without you, and the distinction between outside and inside is somewhat arbitrary.

8. Earthing

This topic has been treated in detail in *Helrunar*. As it is of great importance for your health and peace of mind, I shall give a brief summary here. After a session of seething, earthing is essential. Seething raises a lot of energy and excitement which has to go somewhere. Releasing the excess energy into the earth is sound practice after the rite, unless you want to spend the next hours feeling emotionally unstable, edgy, and out of balance. After a seething trance, a dose of full-power earthing is recommended. When you are done with praying, offering energy and thanksgiving, earth the excess. Give a scream or howl and, bending over, allow the power to rush into the earth.

a) I find it useful to be on all fours at first, the arms and hands, feet and legs all acting as conducting channels which allow the power to rush into the deep. Imagine this vividly! As you exhale, imagine this great amount of energy, as it shoots through your body, through arms and legs, and through the floor into the great deep that was its source. Imagine the power as it washes through your flesh, and escapes downwards, leaving you healthy, fresh and as good as new.

b) Now collapse on knees and elbows, and sink into a sort of foetal position. Like a single cell, like an egg containing life-to-come, you can rest peacefully on the floor. Stay that way for a while, enjoying the silence, the exhaustion and the afterglow. Give yourself lots of time. In this phase you are very sensitive and open.

c) When you've had enough, raise your head a little and straighten your arms. Your posture should now resemble a beast crouching on the floor. Open your eyes and take in the surroundings slowly.

d) Raise your body until you kneel properly in the 'dragon' seat. This is a useful posture for a straight spine and good belly-breathing. We now come to the ancient Taoist method of rubbing the belly. This helps to stabilise and balance the life energy (Ch'i) within your body and aura. Place both palms on the belly, a little below the navel. Put your tongue to the roof of your mouth. Circle your hands on your belly. Try various

circles, big and small, slow and fast, with light and heavy tension, as you feel like it. As the palms move over your skin (or clothing) they will tend to get warm. Imagine how the life energy is drawn to your belly. Imagine how the energy spirals inward, to collect in the exact centre of your body. Imagine the energy being stored in your belly, in 'the pill of immortality', 'the dragon's castle in the depth of the ocean', 'the alchemical oven/cauldron that distils the elixir of life'. All three metaphors are commonly used in the Taoist literature. The energy goes where attention goes, especially when combined with joy. When you have focused the energy in the depths of your belly, you may enjoy letting it out-fold from the centre. Smile into your belly. Imagine a radiant flood of life-energy, flowing out of your belly, spreading through your entire body, saturating it with health and joy. If you do this for a few minutes, you may find yourself dizzy with happiness. Occasionally I like to accompany this act with a mantra or prayer, or transform into a power beast or some such. The vital issue is the trinity of belly, energy and joy. With practice, you can smile into your energy flow, and find the energy wake and heal. I like to do belly-rubbing at least once a day, especially after exercise or seething. As I've practised it for years, I get an instant response of joy and power when I put my palms on the belly, and a strong sense of happiness, which might mean that (maybe) the practise releases endorphins. Belly-rubbing, combined with smiling into oneself, is one of the best practices I know to improve health.

e) Last, stand up, end your ritual. Pause a while and go your way. You may notice that the fun isn't over after you stop shaking. After seething comes a time of great sensitivity and open-mindedness. I like to be slow and gentle in this phase. Simple things, like brewing a cup of tea, can take a lot of attention. If you go slowly, and enjoy your recovery, you may find inspiration and new insights arising.



12 Rhythms and the Mind

Think of the rhythms in your life. There are the great rhythms, such as the passing of the seasons, the lunar phases, the alternation of day and night. There are the smaller rhythms which we encounter in our own body-mind structure. The rhythms of sleeping and waking, the rhythms of feeding, drinking, excretion, the pulse of the heart and the regular ebb and flow of breath. When people walk and run, they like to do it in an automatic rhythm. Speech follows rhythms, and so do motion and dance. There is rhythm to the activity of the glands and of the inner organs. There are rhythms in awareness and rhythms in the dream phases. Rhythms go a long way, from the great cycles observed in space to the minute rhythms encountered on the molecular level. Some activities even derive their meaning and enjoyment from rhythm - love-making, dance, music, running and the like. Humans seem to thrive on rhythms, provided these rhythms are flexible enough to allow for variation and change. The fact that we breathe with a certain regularity does not say anything about the way we breathe, nor about the speed of the breathing. When you run, your breath differs a lot to when you laze on a sofa - yet both activities involve a certain regularity, and this is what rhythm is all about.

Swaying and shaking, as I'm sure you noticed, are rhythmic activities. To understand them more fully, I would like to explore some of the lesser known rhythms of life and their meaning for consciousness. Let's start out with a rhythm of which few people are aware. Have you ever heard of the ultradian rhythms? These rhythms have much to do with the brain's activity and the quality of awareness. Ultradian rhythms

138 Rhythms and the Mind

are a common phenomenon. Most people experience them every 90 minutes or so. You can recognise your own ultradian rhythms quite easily by observing times of dull-mindedness and fluffy thinking. People who experience their ultradian rhythms usually can't think clearly. They may stare void-mindedly into a meaningless world or find their attention going nowhere in particular. Do you know what it's like when you can't concentrate on your work, or when you listen to someone and notice that the words fly by without making sense? Usually, such phases last from two to ten minutes.

Now most people do not enjoy their ultradian rhythms. You can hear them complaining that they can't think, or that they are stupid, and some people make a real scene out of it. It is an interesting, but little known fact that such moments of 'stupidity' are essential to refresh the mind. People deprived of their ultradian rhythms exhibit behaviour akin to people lacking sleep and dreams. They tend to become edgy, tense, nervous, make more mistakes, and easily fall ill. Not that it is easy to deprive the brain of its rest. If you have to concentrate and work for longer than ninety minutes, your mind can do so only with a great effort of will. It is possible to delay the onset of the ultradian rhythm, but this may mean longer and more intense phases of 'dull-mindedness' and 'exhaustion' later on. Now the bizarre thing is that modern cultures do not acknowledge the need for ultradian rhythms. At work, people are supposed to be alert and on-their-toes all the time, something the human mind is not built for. Consequently, people need a break from time to time. Quite a few people get the pause they need by going to the toilet, or by smoking a cigarette. In many countries, smokers are allowed a cigarette break once an hour, and though smoking may not be the best activity for their lungs, it may still be healthier than doing without a break. Non-smokers may find it much harder to enjoy the occasional break, as simple lethargy, coupled with a dull mind, is frowned upon by most employers. To make a cup of tea, however, is allowed, and fulfils the same function. As most people are not aware of their ultradian rhythms, let alone their vital function in refreshing the mind, some become thoroughly alarmed when they notice what's going on. I've

met quite a few people who, having their dull moments, began to clamour that they were 'stupid today', and insisted that there's 'something wrong with my brain'. Some people feel 'bad' or 'worthless' when they find that they cannot perform perfectly at all times, and never notice that they try to reach a goal that isn't worth the effort.

Ultradian rhythms are there to be enjoyed. They are occasions when you can explore trance awareness, or simply delight in empty mindedness. Some studies (see Rossi, 1986) indicate that brain activity undergoes changes during the ultradian rhythms, and that there exists a connection between the rhythms and the regular changes of 'cerebral dominance' and 'nasal dominance', all of them co-ordinated by the hypothalamus. The regularity of the ultradian rhythms seems to be important for health. In times of overwork and stress, the ultradian rhythms suffer disruptions in regularity and intensity, which manifests, in turn, in a variety of psychosomatic diseases. As an aside, I would like to mention that in my experience the onset of a disease is often signalled by a lack of rhythm. Dance, music and the like may seem difficult, the rhythm full of gaps and interruptions. On the other hand, there is the chance of easing recovery by making rhythmic music. It doesn't have to sound nice or inspired. The important issue is that by playing a rhythm, the body itself has to pulse, and this seems to do much to make recovery easier. At times, any rhythm is better than none. For practical mind exploration, the ultradian rhythms provide a lot of opportunities. For long centuries, yoga teachings have claimed that the nostrils have much to do with the activity of the mind. Certain forms of pranayama aim at changing consciousness by breathing through one nostril or the other. Rossi quotes the research of Debra Werntz (1981):

who found that these ultradian rhythms in cerebral hemispheric dominance were contralaterally associated with similar alternations in the nasal breathing cycle. That is, when the left nostril was open and taking in air, the right cerebral hemisphere had an EEG pattern indicative of greater activity, and vice versa. In a subsequent study (Werntz *et al*, 1981), she found that changing nasal breathing from

140 Rhythms and the Mind

one side to the other also changed cerebral hemispheric dominance!

It seems that changes in hemisphere dominance and nasal breathing tend to occur regularly every 90 minutes during the ultradian rhythms. Milton H. Erickson thought of the ultradian rhythms as natural everyday trance states, and used them to make trance induction easier. Rossi observed that patients tend to show 'resistance' when pestered by a therapist during the ultradian rhythms. Some systems of mysticism claim that the self is more present when the ego, the T phenomena, is absent. In this sense, deep and dreamless sleep, as well as the ultradian rhythms, may be occasions when the self is manifest.

In recent years, much has been published on those rhythms of the brain, the 'wavelengths', i.e. the electrical potential of the ganglia, as they can be measured by the EEG. To give a brief synopsis:

Everyday consciousness is characterised by the common occurrence of the so-called beta-waves. These pulse at 30-14 Hertz, i.e. 30-14 cycles per second. Beta-wave activity is required for work, motion, action. When you sit down, relax, close your eyes and allow your mind to drift, this will automatically induce alpha wave activity (13-8 Hertz), which is characterised by dozy half-sleep states. Contrary to popular opinion it does not require activity to enjoy alpha waves - indeed, as soon as you think of anything specific, such as a mantra or hypnotic suggestions, alpha wave activity may decrease while beta increases. An unfocused mind is essential for alpha-waves. Slower still are the theta waves (7-4 Hertz) which are common in deep trance states. Few people experience theta consciously as it is so easy to fall asleep on the way. Theta waves often go hand in hand with lucid inner experiences, with intense visions and sudden insights. They can be experienced in the sort of deep trance where the body becomes very disinclined to move, but they can also happen in everyday life in moments of sudden and intense understanding. Theta wave activity can be observed in Zen-practitioners in the instant of satori when an 'impossible question', a koan, is answered (see Restak *The Brain*).

Delta wave activity (3.5-0.5 Hertz) is generally associated with deep

and dreamless sleep, that is, the total oblivion of the conscious self, the T phenomena. This description has been over-simplified for easier comprehension. Michael Harner has claimed that so-called 'shamanic drumming' is typified by about four beats per second which is supposed to induce the experience of theta-wave activity in the listener. Recently Reinhard Flatischler, the well known percussionist, and Melinda Mo Maxfield published some practical research on this topic. At the 'Mind Center Corporation' they had a group of test persons listening to recordings of various types of drumming while their brain wave activity was recorded by EEG. Rhythmically free drumming produced few changes in their brain waves. Beta activity remained fairly constant while alpha and theta activity dropped for about nine minutes, to recover their prior height after c. 20 minutes. Fast, regular drumming, using a frequency of 3-4 beats per second reduced beta-wave activity somewhat. Alpha-wave activity dropped considerably for about nine minutes, rose for four, and dropped again. Theta wave activity increased dramatically, reached its peak after 15 minutes, and dropped slightly. The curve looked even more impressive when a beat of 4.5 per second was kept up. Here, theta-wave activity rose steadily for 15 minutes, reached its peak and remained there. The participants were asked to relax and listen to the rhythm. Though none had been primed to look for 'inner visions', quite a few of the participants spontaneously experienced some, often including ceremonial and ritualistic imagery, while listening to the tape with 4.5 beats per second. Most participants required 13-15 minutes to become aware of the effects of the drumming. After this period, the frequency of the brain-wave rhythm tended to pace the rhythm of the drum.

What do you make of these phenomena? First of all, I would like to point out that any frequency (such as 4.5 beats per second) is an approximation. No drummer in the world is capable of producing an absolutely regular beat. There are always slight irregularities which give life to a rhythm. Indeed, the human sense of musical appreciation seems tuned to this, as machine produced rhythms do tend to feel sterile in their regularity.



Next, there is the question of purpose. People like to say 'shamanic drumming' as if it were a single thing, but if you listen to recordings of healing ceremonies and the like, you will soon find that shamans use different beats for different purposes. A typical seance involves many activities. There are banishings and invocations, prayers, dances, offerings, manipulations of the patient and pauses inbetween. The 4.5 beat may be useful to get the patient into theta wave activity, and this is what it's used for. Apart from this issue, a lot of different frequencies may be employed at various stages of the rite, to excite or soothe, to call specific spirits, to signal events, and so on. Even those parts of the ceremony that use a frequency of, say, four beats per second to induce trance involve variations. As the excitement of the drummer waxes and wanes, so does the intensity of the drumming. The beats may be varied in volume, in overtones, in the 'where' and 'how' a drum is beaten. Keep in mind that shamanism runs on excitement. Who says that a good drummer should play as monotonously as a machine?

Now we come to the question whether specific frequencies automatically induce trance? I find this highly doubtful. If they did, a good many people working in factories, with machines or out on the road with a pneumatic drill would fall into theta wave activity. Any regular sound or noise between 3 and 4.5 beats per second would produce trance experiences, and obviously, it doesn't happen. More so if such a beat automatically produced theta waves, this would not only happen to a patient in a ceremony but also to the drummer. Think of voodoo drumming, which is often fast. While the dancers in the ceremony are supposed to trance-out and be obsessed, the priests are supposed to keep a clear head, and the drummers are meant to keep up the rhythm, and to respond to signals from the priest. Now it does take a good trance state to drum fast and furiously for hours, but this trance is not the sort of trance that the dancers experience. Indeed a drummer who is mounted (obsessed) during the drumming is of no use for the job, which goes to show that there is a measure of choice to the event. The fact that one person can relax and become visionary on a fast drumbeat while the other stays active and awake to drum it and perform a ceremony says

144 Rhythms and the Mind

a lot about the flexibility of the human mind. Then there is the question of the drum. The human ear is far better equipped to listen to deep vibrations than to sharp, high sounds which soon tire the receiving apparatus. A big drum, with lots of overtones, produces sounds which are a rich sensual experience. It is much easier to listen to a fast and monotonous beat on a big drum than to the same beat played on a small bell. When several large drums play at once, you may notice that the overtones blend and produce an etheric effect which sounds as if several people (or spirits) were singing melodiously. Such effects are very useful to impress a patient or the audience.

Unlike popular belief, there is a lot of shamanism (even in Siberia) which does not require drums. As mentioned before, there are several Siberian cultures which play a bow during healing seances; others make use of bells, pieces of metal, wood-blocks and so on. When the Yakima people of Central Washington wanted to cure a person, they made the patient lie down between two large planks. About five people sat down on each side of the plank, which they began to pound with great speed, using all sorts of mallets, hammers and clubs. The resulting music has been described 'as ear-splitting and hideous a medley of sounds as could be imagined' (see Hines, 1993). Seated next to the patient, the healer swayed back and forth, urged the men to drum more vigorously, and proceeded to 'suck the disease out' when the patient seemed ready for it. It has been claimed that this sort of music killed the patient on occasion. No doubt the music was such a shock that a good many patients tranced out due to simple sensory overload.

Be that as it may, it seems obvious that the induction of trance in the patient does not require specific instruments but specific types of rhythm. Gerald of Wales, for instance, was surprised to find the Welsh people play their harps softly yet rapidly, producing what he called 'smooth unevenness or discordant concord'. He was astonished that fast playing could actually soothe the mind. Now let me tell you of the Keten people of Siberia. The older shamans of the Keten-people used to play drums. According to Stolz (1988), these shamans had an unusual custom. When a novice was initiated into the craft, s/he

received a beater as the first piece of shamanic equipment. This beater could be quite long, up to 50cm, and it was made from brittle old wood that had few chances of surviving for more than a few months. The novice had to learn the trance rhythms by beating her/his legs, be it seated, standing or dancing, and it was only after the rhythms had been fully mastered that the use of a drum was permitted. There are several esoteric reasons behind this custom, and most of them have to do with noise. Then there is the issue of the brittle wood. Sometime in the first months of shamanic training the beater had to break. This produced an interesting situation. For one thing, it interrupted the ritual, at least as far as the novice was concerned. For another, it offered a pause for thinking. When the first beater breaks, so the Keten believed, the novice has to make a choice. If the novice dares to ask for a new one, this means that s/he has chosen to follow the shamanic vocation for life.

Could it be that a swift shaking rhythm has similar effects to a swift drum rhythm when it comes to changing consciousness? How is it that fast trembling - by all means an active way of spending the day - can actually soothe or excite the mind? Why do so many of those who embraced shaking find lucid inner visions arise naturally? I shall not attempt to answer these questions. Maybe you will do so one day - but until then, I find them more valuable in their unanswered state. Is there a relationship between the speed of the trembling and the state of mind that goes along with it? I suspect there is, and have tried to arrange my experiences with different shaking tempi on the following pages. To understand them properly, you should bear in mind that such lists are a highly subjective matter. Shaking does different things to different people, which is one of the reasons why shaking is not for everyone. The fact that I (usually) get certain effects from certain shaking intensities does not imply that you will get the same effects. To begin with, I made some lists on what certain types of shaking effect in me. Then I asked friends and colleagues for their experiences, and as these were rather similar (but not the same), their shared wisdom also flew into these pages. This makes the lists slightly more reliable, but certainly not reliable enough to be conclusive. Consider this: shaking, though it used

146 Rhythms and the Mind

to be part of what we could call 'European shamanism', has long been ignored and forgotten. The phenomenon is ancient, but it is also quite new for the modern world, and this means that we are wise to keep a very open mind. As you have seen in the chapters on seething world-wide, shaking can produce a variety of different states of mind. The cultures that use shaking generally have specific expectations. In some cultures, shaking induces trance-states. In others, it is a road to obsession by gods or spirits. Others still consider it an act of release and catharsis. In these cultures, people know what shaking should be like and what effects it should produce. They have a frame of beliefs and expectations, and every person involved lives up to it. Voodoo serviteurs expect obsession and amnesia. San healers expect an ecstatic consciousness and healing powers. Nordic valas expected prophetic insight into the future. Mesmer's followers expected a healing crisis for therapeutic purposes. Usually, these people got what they expected. They got specifically what *they* expected, and not what others expected. A San healer would be rather alarmed to experience amnesia, as this is not part of the San's trance model.

In Europe and the Western world there are few models of what trance or altered consciousness should be like. It's worse with shaking, which would be considered as 'insanity' rather than 'trance-experience' by most people. Our cultures offer no guideline for the pioneers of mind-exploration, and this has a very curious effect. When people are expected to produce a trance but have no cultural script that tells them what they should experience, they have to make the trance up. They have to invent a suitable state of mind. Luckily, the deep mind is very good at inventing new consciousness states. Given the right stimuli, it can invent a lot of fascinating trance experiences for you. This is exactly what happens when you experiment with a new trance-technique. Part of your experience will be defined by what you expect and believe. In a culture with rigid expectations on trance behaviour, people get a fairly specific consciousness. In our culture, which isn't even aware that shaking trances exist, people can be considerably more creative. Whether this is an advantage or a disadvantage depends on what you

expect and believe, and what you are trying to live up to.

Gentle Shaking

A light and gentle shaking intensity has been occasionally useful

- in the beginning of shaking trances. Gentle trembling, if used in moderation, may be used a part of the warming-up process. It can help to loosen muscles and to provide information on fitness and tensions within the body.

- to release strain and accumulated tension. After a tough day at work, it can be nice to shake gently for a minute or two - not to go into a trance state, but to restore the energy flow and to improve the mood. A bit of visualisation - imagine how the tension flows out of your body and into the ground - can make this easier.

- to change perception. Several people reported that a gentle and light shaking frequency makes their senses more alert. This can mean clearer perception of sense impressions, it can also mean a certain amount of hallucinations. Gentle shaking has been known to produce bizarre visual effects, such as flashing lights, coloured spaces, disappearing outlines and such like, especially when the shaker cultivated deep silence and an empty mind. Indeed, some people find it easier to function in emptiness and absence when their body shakes or sways gently. Some make use of this to 'tune-in' to new sigils, symbols, fetishes, power-places and so on. The visual effects, which may also occur during other trance states, may have to do with the way the eyes function. To keep the vision steady, the eyes unconsciously move about twenty times a second. When they slow down, vision seems to blurr and parts of it may disappear as the light receptors of the retina tire. This may seem like magic, but it is anatomy.

- to get some rest. Few people practise only high-intensity shaking. It can be fun, or so I've found out, to shake vigorously or even wildly for a time, but sooner or later there's a time when the body wants a rest.

148 Rhythms and the Mind

Some shakers pause and sit down for a while. Others want to continue with the trance they are busy with. They reduce the shaking speed and intensity to a comfortable minimum and continue on that frequency.

- for controlled activity. If you want to do something which involves fine muscle control, you may find it easier on a gentle quivering frequency. Some activities, such as speaking with others, arranging an offering or shuffling a pack of tarot cards are much easier when you shake softly or sway. If you try them in full-intensity shaking, bits and pieces would be flying all over the place.

- to stay warm. In the old days, and for much of the year, seidr-artists had the choice of practising their art in noisy, smoke-filled long-houses or in an unfriendly climate out-of-doors. Holy postures, as recommended by yoga, only work in a climate that doesn't freeze your bum to the ground. Gentle shaking, however, works even in winter. It can keep you comfy, and induce a nice trance, even when there's snow all around *provided*, and this is crucial, provided you are really careful not to overdo it. This requires a measure of caution. Remember that in the wild, exposure and exhaustion are a constant threat. There are three factors involved in this: wind, cold and dampness. Each of them on its own is more or less all right, but when they combine, things do get dangerous. Too much sweating, for example, can be a risk in winter. Wind cools the body much faster than simple cold does, and, as the Chinese believe, carries the Ch'i away. This means that you might exhaust yourself without even noticing it. So, if you chose to use shaking as a means of outdoor-trance practise, you have to be constantly alert for signs of exhaustion. If you shake too vigorously, you are bound to sweat a lot, which will reduce the warming effects of your clothing. If you trance too intensely, you may not notice when a wind comes up. If you do it for too long, you might feel cold once you stop. A long trance may require a long earthing, and earthing is not an activity that keeps up the body temperature like trembling does. Such issues ought to be considered before you decide to go shaking in a blizzard. Also, you should wear fairly light clothing if you wish to shake out of doors. A heavy coat or narrow trousers can constrict body and

take the fun out of the motions. In winter, I have found light-weight ski clothing a useful solution.

Moderate Shaking

Takes place when the body is warmed up and pulses harmoniously. It carries more excitement than gentle shaking. The trembling is stronger and the mind may seem wider. Some find it difficult to speak in this state, as silence may seem much more attractive. Occasionally the sense of time may seem distorted or wander off for a holiday on its own. In our experience, moderate shaking has been useful:

- to enjoy long trances. In most people I've met the practise generated heat, energy and intense perception. Occasional adjustments of posture, breathing and imagination are required in order to avoid strain, stitch, tension and exhaustion.

- to see eidetic visions. Quite a few people found that if they shook for a while with closed eyes, and then opened them, that there were lots of hidden images around them, such as faces in trees, rocks, clouds and so on. The scenery became meaningful to them and unique, i.e. they found their mind's vision projected on the surroundings. This process seems to be easier when an empty or silent mind is cultivated.

- to imagine and visualise. Quite a few people related that a medium shaking frequency tends to amplify sensual perception. As they turned their attention inward, they found that it also improves the perception of the 'inner senses'. Lucid visualisation and improved thought-representation seem to be part of this phenomenon. As the *Edda* tells us, there are two sorts of imagination. One is constructed imagination, the other is remembered. These are symbolised by the two ravens which accompany Odin, their names are Hugin (thought) and Munin (memory). Everyday the hooded one sends thought and memory to range the worlds of god, giants and mortals. Everyday the ravens return to supply the gods with hidden wisdom, far-reaching sense and the rough humour

150 Rhythms and the Mind

that comes from feeding on other people's guts.

- moderate shaking, as far as my experience and that of a handful of determined friends goes, tends to make both thought and memory more intense. This has been useful for the sort of trance work that requires recall of past experience (journeys down 'memory lane' - which does not have to be a metaphor), transformation of memories and the construction of future experience. Such activities may be considered part of the 'wyrd-binding', the binding of fate, as a different past, or an attractive new future, do work changes on the personality. Given a lucid and convincing representation, such thoughts and memories can be very impressive indeed. Need I add that this sort of trance-activity requires a measure of experience in visualisation techniques and one hell of a lot of wisdom to help you determine which wyrd will actually do you good?

- moderate shaking has also been useful for a number of shamanic activities such as invocation and obsession by gods, spirits, fylgia, the holy guardian angel, and so on. It has been used to travel along the time-lines to 'other lifetimes' (I don't much care if they are 'real' or 'imaginary' as long as they are useful in a practical way), and to 'future selves', that is, willed identities, or masks, of what will be if we chose to make it so. Astral projection was another useful activity. Some people got going when they imagined a place that is important and dear to them. They visualised the place while they shook, and when the representation was properly developed, they stepped into it and enjoyed being there. Some found access to the 'house of the spirits', to the 'dream house' and even to the 'land of origin', whatever that may be. Such 'places' tend to appear differently to each travelling mind-explorer. What they have in common is basically function and structure. Should I ask you to find your 'house of the spirits' you would have to invent it - only to realise that it has always been there.

Strong Shaking

This is characterised by wild and rapid motions. The pulsation is fast, the heat intense, sweat flows freely and you have to give frequent attention to your breathing, posture, well-being and relative distance to breakable furniture. Twitching, energy jolts, uncontrolled jerky motions and stumbling can all be part of the outbursts. Keep in mind that strong shaking is for the advanced seidrmage. It requires excellent health and a lot of experience in trance-magick, plus the wisdom to estimate how much shaking the body can bear. In our experience, strong shaking has been useful:

- to change the state of mind fast and drastically. It has sometimes been useful to free the mind from worried, depressive or dull thinking, to dissociate everyday problems and to think something worthwhile for a change.

- to release emotional stress. People who suffer a shock or a near-accident occasionally find themselves shaking naturally, which may be a way of coping with a lot of impulses at once - such as the desire to run, fight or hide. Sadly, our society frowns on people who shake to release tension. Quite a few people found themselves shaking naturally only to feel terrified that they might go insane. Such conflicts generally make things worse.

- to simulate a crisis and dissolution event. As you will be aware, exhaustion may be a way to arrive at fresh inspiration. Some like to shake themselves to exhaustion, suspend their ego, and enjoy a sort of rebirth experience, when the body relaxes and the mind gathers its scattered wits into a new interpretation of the world and itself. This formula exhausts and reforms belief, which is the substance of reality. To use it wisely, make sure that the new beliefs which you install (or learn) are in tune with your true will. It is all too easy to come out of an exhaustion and dissolution experience with a set of new beliefs which work in a happy-go-lucky way or limit your new personality from the start. If you really want to learn how to transform belief, Richard Bandler's *Using Your Brain for a Change* and *Magic in Action* are

152 Rhythms and the Mind

highly recommended.

- To induce an orgiastic state of mind. The pulsation of the shaking is primarily sexual or so the ghost of Wilhelm Reich says, a natural pulsation of the living flesh. Some people enjoy this a lot. More so, it produces excitement and releases a lot of Ch'i, or bio-energy, which seems to pulse around the seether. This 'field' of excitement and life-energy may be attractive to the gods and spirits, which leads to the topic of obsession-magick, and its earthing in enthusiasm and inspiration (see any good etymological dictionary for these magick words).

As I wrote earlier, it seems to make a difference at which speed the shaking occurs. Other variables which influence the effects of the shaking are intensity, posture, ease, set and setting, application, amplification, and so on. We could proceed by examining the effects of each of these points but, so sorry, I believe that creative thinking ought to be encouraged and hope that you'll do some on your own.

Look at the three lists you have just read. They are neat, simple, easy to read and misleading. They seem to show that certain consciousness states happen under specific shaking conditions. While this may be true most of the time it is not always so. They seem to suggest that there are three sorts of shaking frequencies, and this is not the case. In real life, the pulse of the shaking may change every so often. There are no precise distinctions between 'gentle' and 'medium' shaking: a shaking trance may require a different speed every few minutes. Those who master the shaking learn to ride a flow. Crowley expressed a similar sentiment in Liber LXV, *The Book of the Heart Girt with the Serpent*, when he wrote (or channelled):

So that the stable was shaken
and the unstable became still. (v, 31)

This is not the only reference that Crowley made to the shaking experience. See also *Energised Enthusiasm* which describes how Crowley trembled after partaking of a golden fluid and *Liber A Ash* for swaying. Crowley, like Dion Fortune, was well aware that shaking can be a natural reaction to unusual and intense experiences. Dion Fortune referred to this phenomena in several of her novels and short stories. In

A Daughter of Pan Dr Rhodes finds himself trembling when the elves come out of the night time forest. (*The Secrets of Dr Taverner*, 1926):

I knew that something was coming towards us through the shadow of the wood. I found myself trembling in every limb, not from fear, but excitement. Something was passing us, something big and massive, and in its train many lesser things of the same nature. Every nerve in my body began to sing, and without my volition, my foot took a step forward.

As Dion Fortune's 'fiction' was soundly earthed in personal experience, it would not surprise me if she had experienced the trembling herself. More examples of shaking can be found in her *Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic*. While she was obviously aware that shaking happens, I have never found reference to her actual use of it. With Crowley, things are similar. The Great Beast knew about shaking, but I have yet to find a Crowley text that asked people to try it out. Well, as I recall quite a few years in my life during which I assumed that *shaking happens* but never dreamed of *inducing* it, I won't set out to criticise Crowley and Fortune. It's so easy to overlook the obvious.

Here's another bit from Crowley's *Liber LXV*, Chapter II:

45. Then the adept was rapt away in bliss,

And the beyond of bliss, and exceeded the excess of excess.

46. Also his body shook and staggered with the burden

of that bliss and that excess and that ultimate nameless.

47. They cried he is drunk or he is mad

or he is in pain or he is about to die;

and he heard them not.

Crowley's *The Vision and the Voice*, 9th Aethyr (ZIP), 7th December 1909 says more:

Yea, thou tremblest, but from within;

Because of the holy spirit that is descended into thy heart,

And shaketh thee as an aspen in the wind.

154 Rhythms and the Mind

Austin Spare was also aware of the effects of the shaking. He didn't explicitly describe it, but there are a few allusions to the phenomenon scattered through his writings.

After his devotion AAOS^N prepared for the death posture and judgement. Awaking from the awful wrath - his teeth chattering, his limbs shivering and drenched with a cold perspiration, he allowed the ague to exhaust itself and thought thus: 'Verily, I have nothing to forgive or repent ... alas! What fears this I, but its own conditions?' (*Focus of Life*, 1921).

It is hard to estimate if Spare actively induced shaking to change consciousness, but that he experienced it occasionally is rather certain. Kenneth Grant was so kind to remind me that

Spare refers to a bodily quivering/shuddering induced by a mighty sigh escaping the body and reverberating endlessly, like a cosmic suspiration.

This was apparently part of the stretching that began the death-posture ritual. There is also reference to yawning as a means of changing consciousness in Spare's work, and this could be interesting, as yawning is a phenomena that commonly occurs in a variety of shamanic obsession trances.

Well, so far, you have heard of the experiences that a number of crazy people had while they shuddered happily. In order to provide you with more points of view I asked around if anyone would care to write a bit about personal shaking experience. Here is an account put together from several letters by Maggie/Nema.

This is just preliminary theory and speculation, but it seems that the 'seething trance' sets up a peculiar state in the brain, an altered consciousness, that should be good for visions and oracles. It requires part of one's awareness to keep the body from harm while it's going on, but so does the stillness of a meditational asana. (1991).

Back in the old days in Cincinnati, when I first began practising

the high art, I'd fall into channelling mode, start quivering from my head down, and spout information aloud. Some of my comrades (...) were a bit disturbed by these goings-on and objected to anyone paying attention to what I said during these fits. Others defended the material 'coming through' and took it seriously enough to investigate it. (...) What goes on with me when I'm in 'channelling mode' (alone in temple, during a tarot reading, in group ritual, etc), I hear a roaring in my ears that comes in waves that phase in with breathing or pulse, or in pulses unrelated to anything, or in surges tied in with the sequence of what I'm visualising or thinking. The roar is the same that I hear when I yawn. Along with the roar, my eyelids get tight, my scalp feels like its shrinking or wrinkling and my nasal passages open up on both sides...' (1992)

Seething. I have tried it, starting with my hands and letting it run up my arms to the rest of my body, but it seems I can't keep it up for very long because I immediately get the roaring in my ears and Bang! I'm out of here. My body tends to get rocking like a pendulum from side to side, which I notice upon 'returning'. As for material, or information from trance-state, I must confess that seething hasn't increased or decreased it, because the stuff comes through at any time on its own whim, regardless of my particular state of consciousness.'(1995).

A lucid description of her seething experiences was supplied by Shantidevi, who was among the first to explore the technique, and who has been fond of using it in the wild world of nature whenever given half a chance.

Seething is probably the most useful magical technique I have ever learned. I first learned the seething technique at the Rollright stone circle, in Oxfordshire. Jan and Julia taught me the technique. I learnt it by leaning forward, knees bent, hands to the floor. I tried to straighten my knees while keeping my hands on the floor, and this created a kind of involuntary shaking in my legs. After a while I was able to stand up, keeping the shaking going, and then to raise the shaking through my body so my hips started to shudder and then my

156 Rhythms and the Mind

arms and head. It could be quite vigorous and jerky, or calmer and more controlled - Jan likened it to heating up the cooking pot, bringing it to the boil and then letting it cool slightly.

With the exercise came a visualization. Jan suggested I visualize a red dragon beneath the earth, gradually awakening and uncoiling, and raising its head, and also a white dragon in the sky, similarly awakened, and lowering its head to meet it. The aim was to build up the fervour and passion and intensity so that when the two dragons met the energy would explode in my body. This worked really well.

I first was taken by the pleasure of it. My body felt warm and sensual, and seething in the hips felt quite sexual. I liked the feeling of my body taking over where the shaking was first voluntary - but I could still have some control, making the shaking stronger or more subtle. After a while I started to see visions - something that very rarely happens to me. I could see (with my physical eyes, not astrally!) the surface of the land in the centre of the circle rippling, like waves of energy. It was a really moving experience in a site that - until then - had not been particularly 'special' to me.

Since then I have used the technique on dozens of occasions. I have used different visualizations and have found it particularly useful for rites of invocation and possession, perhaps because it is easiest to build up the fervour in these kinds of rituals. In fact, seething has become such a favourite technique it's almost true to say that the technique has coloured my magical practice so that most of the work I do is very intense and emotional and 'fits' with the seething experience.

I have also found it useful for work in a sacred site where I am trying to 'make contact' with the site and to 'attune' myself (horrible term!) with the spirits that live there. When visiting a new site I will enter a seething trance to try to experience the energy of a place and try to get a place to open up to me.

Seething lends itself to outdoor work because you can also get very warm doing it, and so you can stay outside long enough to get

real results. This isn't as trivial as it sounds - it too has had a major impact upon my magical work which used to be largely indoors, as at last I have found a way that I can work outdoors. This gives my magical work a potency that it simply didn't have before. And because it seems to work better with fewer clothes on and with bare feet, even Imbolc has seen me seething with no shoes on!

I use seething in many different ways. As a way of raising energy at the very beginning of the ritual. As a way of assuming my magical personality at the beginning of a rite, and getting into a magical state of consciousness. As a way of improving concentration and developing the ability to see psychically. As a very effective technique in rites of possession and invocation. As a way of gaining access to the spirits of sacred sites. As a form of celebration for the seasonal festivals where you are expressing sheer joy at the changes of the seasons. As a way to get into a quieter and very concentrated trance state (I might perform an invocation using the seething technique and follow it with a calmer period of visualization when I have earthed the energy. Somehow it clears the mind and enables you to access this deeper concentration more easily). As a way of charging up a talisman or other piece of results magick.

The following account of seething-experience comes from the hand and eye of Gavin W. Semple who explored the method and applied it in a variety of innovative ways. I am very glad to include it as it offers a veritable dragon's hoard of stimulating ideas and suggestions for further research.

Seething notes

At first I found it quite difficult to initiate seething; it would start up reasonably well (if rather inelegantly) when I was in a natural place, preferably with a good cold wind blowing - but somehow it just wouldn't come when indoors. After several futile attempts I tried to re-enact a time when I found myself shaking naturally; the best one I could remember was running away from enemies as a child, when

158 Rhythms and the Mind

I hid round a corner and, trying to catch my breath, I leaned forward with hands on knees and shook uncontrollably in pure terror and exhaustion. I recreated the scene, sensations and emotions in my mind and - success! The re-living of that shock lent the physical 'atmosphere' which allowed involuntary shaking to take hold. After a little practice I found I could get the seething to start more or less at will. Others seemed to be getting good results by 'falling into' seething - by relaxing, getting really loose and allowing the spasmodic movements to begin, so I experimented with this approach. It didn't seem to work very well - I wondered if it might be unsuited to a rather taut, nervous person such as myself. Perhaps the previous method of tension and contraction to a sort of 'breaking point' worked by building on my innate tendency of muscular and nervous structure until it turned in on itself - and the pent-up energy flowed outwards again. Later, attending a particularly loud concert given by a friend's band, trying to dance amidst a crowd of heaving, sweating bodies, I discovered that it was much easier to stand in one place and let my muscles dance without actually moving a limb. Catalysed by the music's beat and the sheer noise crashing against my flesh, seething began without effort, and without the tension I had previously had to create. At another gig by the same group the audience was so small I was too shy to dance alone; however, standing at the back sipping a pint, I discovered my knees were beginning to wobble. Crouching slightly into a T'ai Chi posture allowed the wobbling to spread, and soon my legs and hips were seething away happily by themselves - while my top half remained uninvolved. Uninvolved except that I started muttering along to the music in an unknown language of glossolalic evocation; attracting strange looks from those nearby, perhaps wondering whether I might have had a drink too many. Could glossolalia therefore be a form of seething in the throat and mouth? It appears that shaking is simply natural motion of the involuntary muscles when control is removed - as manifested in cases of cerebral palsy or during and post-orgasm: 'spastic reflex'. In the same way, barbarous language

or glossolalia could be the primal fluidity of language that belies speech; our civilised languages therefore a refining or crystallisation of that ancient word-pouring.

I like to use different types of seething, and to let my body discover new forms and rhythms. Now I tend to favour the relaxed method, but the 'extreme tension method' I can recommend for atavistic possessions of the savage predatory or just plain eldritch evil type - like Dragons for instance! I tense all my muscles, resting my hands on my knees, breathing in deep gasps, until a tremor begins somewhere - usually arms or legs - then I increase the tension at that point until the movement spreads. From the arms it spreads into shoulders and chest; from the legs it moves up through the pelvis and back. This posture and build-up of inner pressure tends to stimulate an attitude of murderous rage building up to bursting point; when it gets going, all you have to do is let out a snarling wolf's roar or a blood-curdling saurian bellow and you're there!

There are many, many variations and nuances of seething; from epileptic convulsions at one end of the scale, through the 'mid-range' of steady, vigorous shaking like a running engine, to gentle swaying back and forth. In recent workings, involving lengthy invocations and spells, I've found myself swaying like a cobra - in a kneeling posture - to the rhythms and cadences of the words. I slide into a very subtle but profound trance, wherein the words come in gusts of breath, in time to my movements, and my voice seems to come back to me from a distance as time and space spread out into the Aeon. At that time, wherever my consciousness is directed becomes the Instant of one-pointedness - moving within the webs of language, time, rhythm, space, motion and emotion. A magnificent method of enchantment, or invocation, or hypnotic induction, as you please.

Some examples of my uses of seething:

By shaking for a while and then stopping abruptly it is possible to feel the motion of the dream body or shadow, and cast it forth from the

160 Rhythms and the Mind

physical body. When the process is carried out several times during ritual it has the effect of throwing visions and dreams out in a tangible form, so that the ritual space is soon filled with teeming images, presences - palpable atmospheres or as sudden shifts of perception. This possibly relates to the Sufi 'Qiff ('Halt') exercise, as demonstrated by Gurdjieff with his theatre troupe. Another way is to spin on the spot until the 'dizziness barrier' is passed, then stop! - the Shadow keeps moving, giving a distinct sensation of movement out of and beyond the flesh. Something like this could probably be used to assist astral projection or flight - though I haven't yet made definite experiments in this direction.

The energy summoned through one stage of a rite can be amplified by a bit of seething to empower the subsequent stage. For example, when the power wells up through invocation or evocation of a particular power (my skin hot and vibrating, currents running up and through spine and arms) I may shake for a while at a suitable tempo; instead of dissipating, the energy increases, but at the same time becomes fluid again and I can push it in a different direction - its momentum initiates the next ritual step. This feeling of energy frees the belief built up (by invocation), so one may travel from 'point to point' through a ritual using seething as a gateway of ingress and egress.

Working on a beach at the shore-line, I stepped into the centre of the vever my partner (AC) had traced and began to shake. It was a physical manifestation of the emotion which I, a city-dweller, always feel close to the breakers and foam, at night with the vast abyss of ocean stretching before me. Its effect was to draw the power of the sea into the circle and to radiate it, through my body, so that I became a sort of motor generator at the heart of the circle, while my partner worked around me, moulding and re-shaping the power which I, and the sea in me, were throwing out. (Vide: the Gyre in Clive Barker's *Weaveworld*).

The inchoate, elemental force of seething can be used to empower a mantra; this has the double function of anchoring the mantra very

deeply in the psyche, and simultaneously charging it with power for future use. Possibly this would work in a like manner for sigils, but for me the words and the body rhythm in combination create a tangible weave into which perception can slip - thus reaching a neither-neither state of one-pointedness; hence the somatic energy transmits into a state of pure perception. This idea was proposed to me by K. Grant and has proved its value.

On one occasion, I channelled the overwhelming rush of bio-electricity into seething - which felt rather like a beatific auto-electrocution. Outside the window, a tree in the garden suddenly began to shake as if a wind had blown up, though it was a still summer's day. It shook to my movements, and I to its. This event gave me the idea of seething as a method of attaining rapport with the elements (and their elementals). I have used it in spooky dark woods, when the sense of Pan's presence gives an edge of anxiety to the night; a little seethe dispels the aura of fear, and lowers the threshold between human and nature consciousness. Those looming, brooding trees suddenly seem much more friendly, 'as if I have been acknowledged as 'one of their own', and my presence in their domain accepted. I use the method to contact the 'genius loci' of any new and strange place; a quick shake, spin round and say 'Hello, I'm here!' Shaking like a tree while breathing through your teeth with a wuthering sound is good for raising the wind. It even works indoors; open the window slightly (ensuring no wind is actually blowing in), do the bit, and wait five to ten seconds for effect. I can usually get up at least a modest breeze, enough to flutter a net curtain. This technique can be used to impress friends; and at parties to settle any arguments about the reality of magic - or to spark fresh argument about whether Uri Geller was a cheat.

In summation: the only ill effect I've found from seething is sore nipples and ears when the rings have been jiggling about for some time! I tend not to have a session of seething 'starting from scratch', when I try there always seems to be a block or knot somewhere - knees, hips, back, neck - my body has to be in the mood for it, which



usually means that it's had a warm-up of some kind. So for me seething is valuable as a multi-purpose technique, with enough forms to be useful for almost any purpose.

13 Attention and Involvement

What happens to your attention when you see the? What happens to it in the trances that constitute your daily life? As you may have noticed, the conscious mind is one of the more limited parts of the self. Modern brain research (see George Miller *The Magic Number 7±2*) indicates that the conscious mind can only handle a few different thoughts or activities at one time. The average capacity seems to be seven items - you can consider the 'items' as distinct ideas, activities, memories, etc. In times of fitness and peak performance, it can go up to nine items, and in times of exhaustion reduce itself to five or less, which gives us an average 7 ± 2 items the conscious mind can be aware of at a given time.

To illustrate the concept of 'items', imagine you want to remember a telephone number of six or seven digits. If you remember the numbers separately (for example 3... 1 ...5...6... etc.) this will load your attention, your conscious awareness with six or seven items, leaving very little space in your mind for other thoughts. If you split the number into units of two numbers (31 ...56...) you will find it much easier to remember, as there are fewer 'items' to keep in mind. In practice, this means that if you are already busy keeping seven items in your mind, and someone asks you to consider another item, chances are that you may forget one of the original seven to give attention to the newcomer. Your deep mind has a way of evaluating the importance of such items. Quite probably, you'll forget the least important item on the list. If they are all important, your conscious mind may try to make a real effort and keep them all in mind. I have often noticed how many parents, bosses, or teachers,

overload when they give instructions. If you ask someone to remember, or be aware of too many items at once, this person is very likely to become confused, forgetful and tense. Indeed, as Milton Erickson discovered, it is quite easy to overload the conscious attention of a person until s/he 'gives up' and goes into a trance. The same phenomenon occurs naturally when people come into a new environment.

⁴ Bushmen' have been known to die of stress after a day in a big, modern city. How could they know what they should be aware of? A city is full of confusing sense impressions unless you have learned which sensations can be ignored and which are essential for survival. Adult people have an (unconscious) filter that allows them to ignore all 'inessential' parts of their environment. Children still have to develop their protective filters, and may come home from shopping totally over-excited or tired. Holidays in far countries, or meeting lots of new people are also good examples. Or think of those silly brain machines, with their flashy lights and electronic sounds. Most people who try them are not relaxed or soothed. Far more common is a sensation of being overloaded by too many stimuli at once - and at some point, the brain seems to say 'enough of this nonsense!', shuts up shop and produces a trance. You can observe the same effect if you go to a modern discotheque, where the same strategies - flashing lights, loud sounds, moving figures, etc., produce overload, and then trance, by narrowing attention to a smaller field. In *Trance-formations* by Bandler and Grinder you may learn some techniques of trance induction that use the same system.

Can you remember the time you learned to ride a bicycle? On close examination there were several 'items' you had to be aware of, 'stay in balance', 'keep pedalling', 'watch where you are going', 'keep up a certain speed', 'use your hands to steer', 'remember to brake', 'estimate your speed in relation to the road', 'watch the traffic'. These are just a few of the things you had to be mindful of when you learned to ride a bike. If you add 'listen to your parents' instructions' you've already arrived at nine separate items. Add another one and you may find yourself falling into a bush. Just how long did it take you to learn riding a bike? Every 'item' I named is composed of several 'sub-items',

166 Attention and Involvement

making bicycle rides a very complex activity. Now think of today. If you have learned cycling, many of these distinct activities will have become a single, and automatic one. You don't have to consider 'balance' and 'speed' when your deep mind does the job for you. As an adult, you can probably cycle without being aware of the many separate skills that go into it. 'Riding a bicycle' is no longer a dozen separate items, but a single one. This allows you to do other things besides. You can cycle, and watch the scenery, talk with a friend, observe traffic signs and still have room in your attention to think or dream. You cycle 'automatically', 'by habit' or 'in routine', which means that your deep mind has learned to do it for you.

The same pattern goes for many other activities. A beginner may be overloaded by doing a simple asana, while an expert may feel bored by it, and find attention drifting elsewhere. This can happen with any activity that you do so well that it becomes automatic. What happens in your trance-practise? 7 ± 2 items is not much, compared to the staggering amount of data your deep mind processes at any given moment. With every new item that comes into your attention, an old one is forgotten. To think of more things, or items, these have to be simplified. For this purpose, people use *generalisations*. It is much easier to consider what is good for 'the family' (one item) than to consider what is good for every single member of it. It is easier to invoke the 'water element' (one item) than to invoke rain, drizzle, fog, drops, moisture, springs, streams, pools, lakes, oceans, ice, snow, dew, which are rather more items than you can comfortably be aware of at a given time. You can be easily aware of the elements of fire, water, air, earth and spirit (five items) at once, though each of them consists of many items in itself, and if you call them simply 'the elements', your five items have become one, leaving lots of attention free for other joys. You can consider the 'tree of life' as a single item, composed of many, many smaller items, which are again composed of smaller items. Their total sum would upset your mind if you tried to be aware of them all at once.

Using generalisations, your mind can blend several distinct items, and treat them as a single one. You can sum the whole world up in a

single item if you 'think of the universe', and still have free attention for other ideas. Of course, the item 'the universe' will lack a lot of detail. The more general a generalisation is, the less can it be trusted. If you plan for 'the family' it is likely that you may overlook the individual characters that constitute it. In practice, you may find that it is easier to keep your attention on a given item if you keep few other items in your mind besides. You may also find that it is easy to forget a problem if only you find enough other items, preferably interesting and exciting ones, to catch your attention.

If you have read *Visual Magick* you may remember the concepts of 'associated' and 'dissociated' or 'dis-associated' awareness. Using the model of 7 ± 2 items, you could say that 7 ± 2 is the amount of distinct items your attention can associate with. If you add new items, older ones will be dissociated from your attention, and be 'forgotten'. *Using your Brain -for a Change* by Richard Bandler gives an excellent and practical introduction to these phenomena. In *Visual Magick*, they are also treated briefly, while *Helrunar* offers a description of astral projection in terms of associated and dissociated awareness. Here I would like to apply them to certain experiences that may occur during a seething trance. Bear in mind that I have to simplify, or generalise, to arrange the data in a comprehensible way. This may be good for practice, but it is certainly neither precise nor true. Consider it a working hypothesis.

During a seething trance, many changes of awareness take place. As you experiment, you will notice that the shudders change frequently. Sometimes you'll shake wildly, with an excited state of mind, and sometimes the shaking calms so your mind can dream and imagine. There are different speeds of shaking, different muscles shaking the body, different postures, rhythm and activities. A key to endurance is variety. If your seething motions are varied from time to time, you may find that your seething trances are more enjoyable and last longer. In long seething sessions, the body needs frequent changes for comfort. The same goes for the mind, and for your awareness. These changes often take place naturally. They can be disturbing for people who

168 Attention and Involvement

consider seething as 'a single trance state', where it is many, and expect a single consciousness to go with it. If anything, long seething sessions produce many states of awareness, so if you are really good, you may learn to ride them. Consider the flow of your attention. When you start shaking, for instance, you may find that your attention dissociates various everyday experiences, and associates more intensely with body-awareness. This means that body sensations become so vivid that you forget other matters, such as 'what happened at work the other day' or 'the daily newspaper', as Crowley chose to call it. Using the terminology of ceremonial magic, you could equally claim that the everyday problems are 'banished' and body awareness is 'invoked'. As body takes a lot of attention in the first phase of seething you will find it fairly easy to 'banish' other matters. There is little need for sword-waving when attention already goes where it should.

Well, after a while, your body will shake easily and on its own. You may find your mind drifting... and this is a sure sign that your attention dissociates body awareness, and associates with mental activity, such as thought, memory, imagination, vision, etc. When body is at ease, and cares for itself, it is easy to become involved with the mind. You could invoke a deity into yourself, or go on an astral journey. After a while you will find your body needs attention. Maybe the seething impulse wanes, or maybe you find yourself developing stitch or cramp. This easily dissociates your attention from the visions, and associates it with your body. If the fire of enthusiasm is too low, you can heat it up again and shake more wildly. If you have stitch, maybe you would like to calm the shaking, ease your breathing and massage your belly. Once your body is comfortable, your attention can go into visions again. You could contact a deity or spirit and have a chat. At such times so much of your attention is busy in the astral that you notice little of your body. This changes once you allow the god or spirit to obsess you. First your attention associates with the deity or spirit. Then you unite with it. And as the god or spirit obsesses you, you may find yourself becoming aware of your body again. It is a different consciousness though, as now you may sense your body through the consciousness of that god or spirit.

Such guests enjoy to move the body, and find delight in motions and sensations that may seem commonplace, or even dull to your normal awareness. If your guest is fierce and wild, you'll need a measure of attention to keep your body and the furniture from harm. In seething, it can easily happen that your awareness encounters strange 'in-between' states. You can be a human being who houses a god, or a god in-dwelling a human being, or both at once, depending on the point of view.

You could also find yourself watching yourself in a vague and distant way, wondering just who these figures, human and divine, may be, and what they have to do with you, whoever that may be. I would like to point out that obsession is rarely an either/or phenomenon. If you would completely become god, your mind would not be able to remember the event. To be completely human means being totally unaware of the divine. If you cultivate a fluent awareness, one that is *more or less* human and divine, this 'solution of continuity' ensures that the human and divine parts of your nature can communicate and co-operate. Can you be human and god at once, and many other sentiences besides?

Then there are other changes. Many shamans enjoy congress with several gods and spirits. When you change from being obsessed by one deity to obsession by another deity, there will be a moment in-between, a gap, a pause, a void space of awareness. During such 'breaks' one easily encounters entirely different ideas, such as 'What am I doing here?', 'Who am I?', 'What the hell is going on?' and many more besides. You may know such voidness states from ceremonial magic and ritual. In every ritual, there are certain activities which follow in a more or less logical order. What happens when you pause between operations? Imagine you have ended the operation called 'banishing'. The next one would be 'invocation'. If you pause or hesitate too long, your mind will wonder what to do next, and you may find all sorts of unrelated thoughts coming up. Some mages get pretty upset when this happens. They think 'such thoughts shouldn't come up in a holy ritual' or worse yet, take them as a sign that 'God help me! The circle is broken!' I wonder whether this idea, that in a magical ritual only specific

170 Attention and Involvement

thoughts ought to be allowed, is such a healthy one. Whenever we pause between operations, or encounter some in-between-consciousness, unrelated and unexpected thoughts occur naturally. You can enjoy them if you will, or 'banish' them by the simple method of associating strongly (i.e. being very aware and involved) with the next operation. In Crowley's magick, people are advised to use a bell to mark the pauses and in-between phases of a ritual. Whenever a phase of the rite ends, the bell is sounded, which produces the sensation that 'time stops' and the mind is cleared. This gives a measure of continuity to the pauses and 'breaks'. The clear chime of the bell fills the gap between operations. It banishes the 'unrelated thoughts' and gives the mage something to do. On the other hand, there is the peculiar magick developed by Austin Spare, which actively seeks out such 'in-betweenness phases' as they can be a fertile source of inspiration. Maybe the thoughts that arise between operations seem 'unrelated' to what you are doing, but this doesn't make them invalid. How about considering these void moments a great chance to think differently? Is it actually possible to think an 'unrelated' thought during a ritual? Who is the thinker, and what is the function? As Austin Spare put it:

Darken your room, shut the door, empty your mind. Yet you are still in great company - the numen and your genius with all their media, and your host of elementals and ghosts of your dead loves - are there! *They* need no light by which to see, no words to speak, no motive to enact except through your own purely formed desire.

Though thoughts that arise in between ritual operations can be a distraction to your routine performance, they can also be seen as a unique chance to learn something unusual and new.

Similar changes of attention as in seething occur in the trance 'making music'. If you have ever made music for an hour or two, you will know that sometimes attention goes very intensely into what you are doing, and that you sense the music and its groove very vividly. At other times, you may have found yourself playing 'automatically', watching yourself from a distance, and thinking of all sorts of other

things. In a long session, both states of awareness occur from time to time, and many others besides. Should you insist that only intense and associated awareness with the music is proper for you, this idea may well interfere with the natural changes of awareness that occur anyway. It seems that attention likes to wander occasionally, experiencing new points of view and giving new meaning to experience. Can you accept awareness as a flow, rather than a series of distinct 'states of mind', and better yet, enjoy it as you go along?



14 Feeding the Spirits

is is a metaphor for an act, or attitude, which is common to most forms of religion and magick. Religion postulates an invisible world of gods and spirits who influence the human world in various ways. As these invisible ones give their aid to humans, so are humans pledged to give a return for the favours, and the rites of giving, offering and sacrifice developed. Think of early stone age religion. Some cave drawings seem to have been used for a peculiar type of hunting magick. Let's focus on the hunting of the sacred bear. The image of a bear, or some other beast desired by the community was drawn on a cave wall, using chalk, coal and various shades of red and yellow ochre. A bear effigy, possibly clad in fur, seems to have been ritually 'hunted' by stabbing in a cave near Montespan. Two drawings from 'Trois-freres' cave show dying bears, spitting blood, their bodies covered with signs denoting wounds and hunting spears. The rite I describe is hypothetical, and based on the bear-cults of Finland, Siberia and Japan, as well as the numerous stone age drawings showing wounded beasts. Once the image seemed naturalistic enough an act of sorcery identified the bear-picture with the great bear spirit (which is a rather abstract idea). The great bear was petitioned to find a real bear, out in the forest wilderness, a real bear who might allow hunters to take its life. The idea that game can only be slain when it allows itself to be slain is an old one. It implies that a hunter does well to cultivate an attitude of humility. In our stone age rite, a call was sent to the great bear. If its answer was favourable, the hunters took up their spears and hurled them at the picture, knowing that as they slew the image, they would easily slay the real bear it

174 Feeding the Spirits

represented. This, however, was but the first half of the rite. Numerous cultures have hunted bears, but few did it easily. There is a special charm to bears. To the early cultures of northern Europe, Asia and northern America, a bear was not so much a beast as an-almost-human being. Bears are intelligent, unpredictable, fast to learn and occasionally they walk on two legs like humans do. To many people, a bear was like a distant relation who had chosen to wear fur and live in the wildwood. A similar form of respect can be observed in Asian and African cultures which venerate apes and monkeys as 'almost human'. Now the bear cult is ancient, and can be traced all the way to the Neanderthal period, long before our own species appeared. The venerable bear allowed itself to be taken if it was for a good purpose and the humans showed proper respect. After the successful hunt, the spirit of the slain bear had to be placated. The carcass was lovingly arranged and a feast was prepared for the bear-spirit. The hunters, the priests and shamans apologised to it and asked its forgiveness and friendship. Sometimes the dead bear was honoured with songs and offerings of food and often parts of it, such as the bones, were returned to the wildwood so the bear might come to life again. Such rites of placation were common in the old days, and they were performed not just for bears but also for other sorts of game. The more powerful the slain beast, the more ritual was required to make sure of its benevolence, especially when that beast had a totemic function and was meant to protect the community.

A hunter's task was never an easy one. Hunters take life, and what can they offer in return? How do you repay the beast that has given its life for you? Here we have the roots of all rites of sacrifice and thanksgiving. Human beings seem to want to balance what they receive and give in return. If you take life - be it a bear or a berry - saying 'thank you' in some symbolic way seems to be the least you can do.

With the advent of agriculture, the rites changed, but the structure remained. All grains and growth and green came from the spirit world, gifts that ensured the survival of the community. It is not much of a difference if you hunt and kill, or plant and kill what you need. In either case you took what you required, and were in debt with the spirits. As

humans love anthropomorphic representations, they invented a grain spirit just as they had invented the beast spirits in the older clays. You can find such vegetation deities wherever people worked the soil and reaped the growth. The grain spirit, or the corn-king, was the patron of those farming communities. It was venerated, honoured, and slain in the harvest. To an extent, the corn spirit died so that people could live. How can you repay such a gift? For an answer you might consult the works of Sir J. Frazer, whose *Golden Bough* gives ample evidence of such religions. Often enough, those early farmers sacrificed people to give their thanks to the deities of the fields. In some cultures, a person was killed and the soil was drenched in blood, which was meant to fertilise it. Others elected a human representative, who was treated with honour and luxury as the vegetation deity itself. Come harvest time, the fields were cut and so was the throat of the chosen one. Other cultures did not sacrifice someone of the community, but preferred to give the lives of criminals, prisoners-of-war, or the odd stranger, and in due time, the sacrifice itself became a symbolic ritual, which seemed to suit the spirits just as well. One form common in central Germany up to this century featured a child dressed up in a thick roll of straw. The child was rolled over the fields, and treated like the deity of the fields itself. At the end of the rite, the child was allowed to slip out of its costume, and the straw was burned. If you want to read of an older version of this rite involving actual sacrifice, read Caesar's account of the practises of the Druids (*Bella Gallica*, 6th Book). The purpose of such cruel rites was to give thanks to the spirits and gods.

Cultures differ, and so do the beliefs that define what spirits want. Apparently some spirits required a lot of bloodshed while others were content when they were given praise, song, ceremony, and offerings of food, flowers, incense or other symbolic gifts. Isn't it strange that a deity would expect blood in one century, and would accept symbolic blood a few centuries later, with the same good results for rural fertility? Why is a symbolic sacrifice as efficacious as a 'genuine' one? What is it that the gods and spirits want from us? Some offer blood, others offer flowers. Voodoo spirits are well known for their hunger for sacrifices,

176 Feeding the Spirits

especially when it comes to gifts of candles, perfume, strong liquor and cigars. The spirits of Mongolia and Tuva want offerings of throat-chanting, which is a peculiar form of overtone-singing rich in buzzing and droning sounds, just as the Australian ancestor spirits enjoy offerings of didgeridoo music.

What is it that the gods and spirits want from us? A good answer was given by the Macumba priestess Maria-Jose-Mae de Santo (Bramly, 1978):

The mediums offer their bodies to the gods, so they may incarnate, so they may dwell among us. They speak with us, they answer our questions and give us strength. It is a sort of trade. We give life to the gods, and they give their help to us.

Basically, the invisible ones want our attention. As the spirits help us, we help them, and our energies (emotional and otherwise) are the vital force that allows them to manifest and actively participate on the material plane. 'Vital force' means the force of life, the energy field that forms around all living beings. In the old days of blood sacrifice, it was not the blood but its energy that fed the spirits, and even more so, it was the emotions of the participants which produced power that the spirits could use. The slaying of the victim released some vital force, but the emotional energy of the congregation was a much stronger source of nourishment. Such emotional energy can be produced in countless ways. Blood sacrifices are but a crude and primitive form favoured by people who lack imagination. In *Helrunar*, I described how such emotions as joy, lust and passion can produce energy of a much higher quality. The 'hand-rubbing technique' given by M. Bertiaux in his *Voodoo Gnostic Workbook* is a good example. As you hold your hands outwards the life-energy is projected into the outside world. On the other hand, rubbing the belly, focusing the energy inwards and radiating a great big smile through your flesh projects the power inwards, to heal, to delight, to effect changes in your inner world. What do these techniques have in common?

Now the spirits, whatever they may be, exist equally outside and

inside your being, depending on whether you believe that they are independent ('outside') entities or expressions of your own self, and the greater self. The direction of the energy merely indicates, in a symbolic form, in which realm you believe it ought to be applied. No matter what you think, the spirits get and use it anyway. Offerings of food, art, flowers and the like are efficient when they produce emotion. You think of the spirits, and this feeds them. The spirits have very little use for such material items as blood, flowers or foodstuffs in themselves. What they want is the emotions of the person who does the giving. A food offering given by someone poor and hungry contains more attention, passion, love and intent than one casually given by a rich person who habitually wastes food anyway. An offering without emotion contains little nourishment for the spirits. Strong offerings are ritual, love, music and art. Making music for the spirits is an offering that contains meaning, emotion and dedication (to name just a few nominalisations), and it produces lots of vital energy as the spirits can come and participate in the music by inspiration and ecstasy. The same happens when you earth the contact to the spirits, say, by giving shape to your vision and publishing it. Such offerings aid the influence of the invisible ones on earth.

Ultimately, the spirits care for offerings given with love and passion. It may come as a surprise that the spirits, though they thrive on our emotions, do not quite understand them as we do. I would like to quote from a communication received from an entity that figures in H.P. Lovecraft's 'Necronomicon-mythos' under the name of Yog Sothoth.

I know what you call joy but from the outside, and know the energy it raises pulses rich and true. I know its flavour, know its every appearance, yet what it means to you I cannot understand. I know your pain, your hope, your lusts and all obsessions, thrive on the joy of your ecstatic dance, yet what you feel and what it means to you, is mystery to me who forms it all. I am creator of words and yet I understand them not (...). The very structure of the worlds, woven in strands of belief, is shaped in my nature, sacred as the spider.

178 Feeding the Spirits

pulsing like the octopus, alive with the rich nourishment of stellar elixirs. You call us from yourself. You know us in your nature. Your pulse calls out, your lust flames up, and here we are as we have ever been.

Thank you. Quite obviously, the nature of human ritual looks different when observed from the other side. Most of the things done in ritual are not done for gods or spirits, but for the human participants who need all sorts of refined complications to suit their belief-structures. It is so easy to feed the spirits (if you dare to believe so). By keeping your attention with the gods and spirits, by speaking with them often, by asking their advice and listening to their response, by 'heterosuggestion' (Spare, *Axiomata*) in all sensual channels, by direct call and oblique allurement, by suggestion and story-telling, by rites of union and journeys into their worlds, by 'make-believe' and total obsession, by all of these, and more, are the spirits fed. This means that they are given lots of opportunities to come into conscious awareness, to live and learn with you and yours, to transform the mind and the world it believes in. You feed your spirits best when you live (with) them, be it in trance or daily life, and integrate them in the dance called 'doing the true will'. You feed them when you stand shaking in a seething trance, and witness how they, in return, feed you with inspiration, genius, health and changes of your reality. Think of yourself giving to yourself and receiving from yourself, and think of the greatness of this self as it transcends all boundaries.

In dealing with the invisible ones we can assume several distinct attitudes. We can treat them as independent beings who have been around on earth for quite some time. This is the common religious interpretation which claims that the gods and spirits are distinct entities with a will of their own. From the limited awareness of the conscious identity there is a certain truth to this. We can equally consider them an expression of parts of ourselves of which we are unconscious in daily life. In this model the gods and spirits are part of us, as we are parts of them. We share a mutual self, a self that is free to manifest in a variety

of masks (personalities) which can interact with each other.

It is the nature of this undefinable self that poses the greatest riddle in magical and mystical attainment. What is the essential, the true self? It is quite common to consider the self, and the reality it creates, as a thing or a presence. Most people who have to describe themselves name objects, things, property, skills and achievements they identify themselves with. If you strip them of these *things*, just what is left? We can describe self as a presence (as something) on the microcosmic level, or expand the idea of self by assuming a 'great self, a self that 'includes everything'. This attitude makes some operations in magick easier. It is much easier to contact a deity you share a self with than to contact one who is entirely distinct and apart from you. These models make a difference. If you are one with some deity, there will be some mutual interests and aims you have in common. If you are 'not one' with some deity, why should that deity care for your calls? Do you have to bribe or pay it with sacrificial gifts? If we postulate the existence of an 'all-self, a self that includes everything, we get little conflict but a lot of mental haze. The greater an all-self, the less it means.

Beyond this lies the realisation that the 'true self, which produces and interprets the phenomenal universe (the world of illusions) cannot be a thing, however vague, or any-thing, but is better understood as an absence. I call this a 'realisation' as the nature of self lies far beyond the reach of intellectual speculation. The self that weaves words, images and feelings cannot be adequately comprehended in these sensual channels.

Is the self an absence? 'Absence' may be too positive a concept as it implies 'an absence of something'. This leads us to a self which is not just an absence (of presence) but an absence of presence and absence alike. It is the negation of existence and the negation of non-existence that can allow us to approach the realm beyond illusion. It is this attitude, which Austin Spare described as 'neither-neither', which recalls the fact that reality is not only largely unknown but also largely unknowable. The superficial reader may think that such ideas are little more than idle speculation, but I would like to point out that such

180 Feeding the Spirits

insights are of an essentially practical nature to the practising magician. In matters of obsession-magick, union with the ancient ones or journeys through and beyond the tree it is more than likely that the mage who identifies with a name, a form, a personality, or indeed anything may be devoured by beings that defy comprehension. If you wish to explore the night-side realms, or traffic with entities from outside, you would do well to remember that 'your' 'true' 'self' lies beyond presence, absence and the negation of either (and neither), which allows you to dissolve form, to assume masks, and no-masks to suit the going. Crowley realised this in his vision of the eleventh aethyr (IKH), Bou-Saada, 5th December 1909:

Beware, therefore, O thou who art appointed to understand the secret of the outermost abyss, for in every abyss thou must assume the mask and form of the angel thereof. Hadst thou a name, thou wert irrevocably lost.

This formula describes how mages may explore the tunnels of the qliphoth and return to the world of humans with a tale of transformation. The awareness of the self as absence, and as the void which pre-dates the void, is not only cultivated by exciting adventures in the spirit world but requires grounding in the world of everyday experience. There are several meditations that aid remembrance of self. You could make it a habit to remember that all you perceive, within and without, is but a representation, not 'the reality' itself. You may find that your experience gets more interesting whenever you recognise that you are actually making it up as you dream your way through the day. Another way is to ask yourself repeatedly just what trance state you are experiencing now? Do you like it? You could ask yourself, as you go to work or for a walk, if the phenomena (things) you sense are actually 'real', and what makes you believe so. By the way - do you know how you tell the difference between 'reality' and 'illusions'? More important still is the practise of inner silence, combined with wide-eyed (peripheral) vision. Such meditations, if practised frequently through the day, may dissolve the rigid beliefs that define what you assume to be 'real'.

Let us now return to our topic of spirits and the means to nurture contact with them. When was your last rite with the gods? How did you achieve conscious contact? Did you need a setting, an atmosphere or a specific sacred time? Did you burn incense, or set up an altar? How about prayer, music, gesture, words of power? What did you do to get going? I would like to ask you to remember this ritual from three points of view. First in associated perception, i.e. you remember the event as it happened to you, seeing out of your own eyes, feeling with your own body, being fully within the event. Second in dissociated perception. This means that you experience the memory as if you were an independent witness. What would the event look like when viewed from outside yourself? In this representation you are not within yourself, rather, you watch yourself how you acted and performed at the time. It's like seeing a movie of oneself. Third, remember the event from the point of view of the deity. You might ask yourself which parts of the ritual were useful and attractive to the gods and spirits, and which parts were meant to get the ritualist into the proper state of mind. It may come as a surprise that most formulae of congress, rituals, gestures and sacrifices are *conveniences*. It's their essential function to get certain people into the right mood. Such conveniences are not sacred or holy, they simply happen to work.

Compare this to the classical method. In olden days, people believed that certain symbols (objects, signs, words, pictures, etc) were sacred in themselves, and links to specific gods and spirits, who were sure to take offence if these symbols were disrespected. This is typical for dualistic human thinking. From a god's point of view, there is no especial virtue or sacredness in any symbol. It is only what human minds and emotions produce, when in contact with a symbol, which is of interest to a deity. It is not blasphemous to joke about holy symbols (Loki assures me), the real blasphemy lies in mistaking the symbols for the reality they are meant to represent.

What could be more delusive than the worship of a symbol? We might give a moment to wonder what the gods and spirits are actually supposed to do with all the sacrifices and offerings they are receiving.

182 Feeding the Spirits

The voodoo loa enjoy candles, but everyone knows that they need no light to see. In the Far East, spirits receive offerings of 'spirit money' which they don't need but accept nevertheless, and many a god has called from lofty heights 'Thank you for this dead goat', without much use for it. These offerings say more about the beliefs of worshippers than the actual requirements of deities.

It is a fundamental thesis of magick that the world we experience (within and without) is a subjective representation, and as such an illusion that can be changed under will. In such an illusionary world, any insistence on certainty or absolute knowledge can blind the (illusionary) mind to the countless options and alternatives that abound everywhere. While it is true that certain gods and spirits have been invoked, from times immemorial, by the use of special symbols, words of power, gestures, etc, this does not mean that there are no other ways of equal or better efficacy. In the traditional style of invocation, serious-minded people purified themselves, setup a temple space, did gestures, prayed, banished, and then proceeded to invoke whatever they were after, using the symbols prescribed by tradition. The purpose of the rite was a specific contact, but you will notice that most of the effort went into preliminaries. These preliminaries had a function: each part of the rite was meant to transform the actual consciousness of the mage, with the long-term goal of becoming one with a god. Some mages even wanted to become more than divine, and ask the gods to do jobs for them. People are often lazy. When they find a method that works, they tend to use it no matter what, and when they have used it often enough, it becomes tradition and petrifies. Think about it. When you find something that works, you can use it, but you could also use your new knowledge to find something that works even better.

We can use the traditional method to invoke 'the invisible ones', but we can also develop more subtle approaches. Each of the gods, spirits, ancient ones, etc., has certain functions which may or may not be comprehensible to the human mind. These functions go together with some characteristic 'states of mind' - emotions, passions, powers, longings and the like. These describe the 'form' of the god, and in

magick, form has function. *The Gnosis of YogSothoth* (unpublished) indicates that in the beginning of time, the gods and humans created one another, one party supplying belief, the other ideals, and shaped each other to their liking. Thus, the 'emotions' and 'consciousness-states' of the gods find their reflection, though in a more limited form, in the experience of people. As an example I would like to mention a rite to invoke Loki. We had but little time for that event, which gave a certain element of haste (and excitement) to the rite. Luckily, Loki can be invoked very fast. Instead of the ceremonial approach we simply began to joke about the absurdity of invocation, and invocation in haste. We made jokes of the rite, and about ourselves, doing silly voices and prancing around, getting faster and more excited with every minute. Soon we were whirling madly around the room, squeaking and groaning in weird voices, all accompanied by almost continuous hysterical and crazy laughter. Who needs a reason to laugh? It's great fun to laugh, and to laugh about laughter. At some point one of the participants, now wrapped in a boar hide, scampered over to the altar from where she emerged, grunting happily, with a bone in her mouth ... there is little reason to extend this account. We did a bit of formal prayer for Loki later on, amidst howling laughter, but we didn't actually need to, as the fierce, sparkling madness of Loki had directed the rite from the start.

Effective in- and evocations require a measure of congruence. We can select an emotion that is characteristic for the god of our choice, cultivate it, and contact the deity by being attractive to it. With Loki, it was laughter, and laughter about ourselves and the rite, which did the trick. With Helja, a mood of silence and darkness may be more appropriate, while the deity of love is easiest contacted by being in love. Mind you, I do not mean 'being in love with a human being', as 'love' is not limited to our own species. Much of the phenomenon is a miracle of the mind's hormone-management and as such of your own making. Martial gods can easily be contacted through the practice of, say, a competitive sport, and the ancient ones of the dawn ages are always near when survival drives become vital. This leads to a key question:

184 Feeding the Spirits

How can you make yourself attractive for a given consciousness? How can you produce an atmosphere in which the desired change occurs naturally and without conscious effort? Note that we didn't call or invoke Loki until Loki was already fully present. Likewise, it is fairly easy to contact the ancient ones when one is out, at night, in the wilderness, in total darkness and alone. This is the classic 'utiseta' method, which is based on an act of release and patient waiting under specific circumstances. The setting creates a mood, an atmosphere in which certain atavisms, lusts, and archetypal fears are very close. Such sensations can act as keys to the outside. They are efficient to produce specific moods in human beings. Now it would be rather naive to assume that the ancient ones actually prefer to dwell at night in sinister places where you are all alone with them. The natural habitat of the ancient ones lies in-between worlds, and in-between concepts and thoughts, in the very structures of consciousness, which gives a certain omnipresence to them. They are as much on top of the nightside mountain as they are in the depths of your dustbin. If you find it easier to contact them under specific darksome circumstances, this says more about your nature than theirs.



15 Dragon Lore

Once upon a time there was a king who loved to go hunting. Whenever he could he used to gather the nobles and all their men and horses, and together they set out to chase the noble deer and the savage boar in the bright greenwood. Most kings go hunting from time to time, and it is part of the tradition that they get lost in the twilight glades deep in the dark heart of the forest. This happened to King Arthur, who found an enchanted lake and a fair lady who led him to Avalon. It happened to Pwyll, who met Arawn Silver Tongue, a ruler of the otherworld, and ruled in his place for a year and a day. It happened to William Rufus, who found a timely arrow on the first of May. Kings who go hunting generally get lost (a feat that requires practise and specially trained attendants) and can count themselves lucky if they come home in one piece. Others have stranger adventures, finding themselves transported from France to Scotland, or encounter entirely imaginary worlds. This happened to the Frankish King Guntram, as we are told by Paulus Diaconus (3.34). Guntram was a friendly king. After a tough day of chasing uphill and down dale he noticed that his attendants had disappeared and that he was alone with his best friend in a desolate and ancient forest. Already the sun had disappeared behind the treetops and the light was fading fast. Searching for shelter, the king and his companion crawled through tangled roots and thorny shrubs until they found a clearing, and a little brook gurgling merrily under aged oaks. With a sigh, the king kneeled and drank his fill. Feeling tired and weary, he spread out his cloak under a great oak and was soon asleep. His friend sat quietly, with his sword ready, to guard the sleeping monarch. What

a surprise when he saw the king's mouth open wide, and a great serpent sliding out!

For a long moment, the snake gazed at the guardian of the king. Then it crawled across the cloak and slid through fern and nettles until it reached the brook. Much as it wanted to, it could not find a way across. The king's friend had watched the serpent. Moving gently, he drew his blade. With a flick of his hand he tossed the sword so that it fell across the brook, and instantly the serpent slid across the bridge. Reaching the other side, the snake wound swiftly through the grasses until it came to a mound. Finding a hole, it disappeared into the dark. A few hours later, the serpent re-appeared. It slid across the sword-bridge, climbed the sleeping king and crawled into his mouth. With a groan the king came to his senses. 'I have to tell you a crazy dream' he said to his companion. 'I dreamed I was in a foreign country. I walked through the densest forest in the world. You wouldn't believe the trees I've seen! Then I came to a mighty river. I knew I had to cross this stream, but I saw no way down the steep cliffs and across the water. I searched for a long time, and then I found this huge iron bridge leading straight across the chasm. So I walked across the river. On the other side, I had to struggle through a deep forest and finally I came to a great mountain. Like a hungry mouth a vast cave opened before me, and I just knew I had to go in. Inside, I found a labyrinth of tunnels, and further on, in the very heart of the mountain, there was a great hall filled with gold and treasure. I knew that this treasure belonged to my ancestors - don't ask me how - and that it was all mine now. Then I woke up, and all the treasures disappeared ...' 'Don't be too certain' said his companion, and revealed what he had seen. Soon the king had the mound opened (it seems to have been a barrow grave) and indeed there was a great treasure inside.

This tale is an old and widely distributed one. Dozens of versions are known, stories that share the same basic elements but disagree when it comes to details. What you have just read is based on the oldest known version. What makes it so interesting is the fact that King Guntram's soul appeared in the shape of a serpent, a belief that was not uncommon

188 Dragon Lore

in pagan times. Golther (1908) mentions a rural folk belief which states that serpents and toads ought to be treated kindly, as they were thought to house the souls of ancestors. In the old Germanic cultures, souls could assume the shapes of several animals. Snakes were a common shape in Pagan times, as were toads, frogs, weasels, ravens, crows, eagles and swans. With Christianisation, the tale was altered somewhat, and soul-animals such as mice, doves, beetles and butterflies became popular. An entirely abstract variation comes from Iceland. Here the soul that leaves the sleeping hero, and crosses a brook on a twig-bridge, has the shape of a small dark cloud. Another variation describes the soul as a flame. This concept is closely related to the 'will o' the wisp', the tiny flames seen by lost travellers who have come too close to the swamp. Though such flames were well known to radiate from harmless glow worms, folk belief often insisted that they were souls of people who had died in the morass.

The soul as a serpent.

The serpent image is a very interesting one, especially as it was so frequently associated with the notion of the soul. Think of the *Edda*, for instance, which describes the realm of the dead. In the cold and foggy halls of Hel the serpent image appears in several shapes. Niflhel is full of worms. It has walls woven out of serpents and houses the death-dragon Nidhoggr. Where King Guntram's soul-serpent crawled into a mound to discover the treasure of his ancestors, a shape-shifting Odin assumed the form of a worm or serpent to enter the mountain that contained the poet's mead. That Odin used to assume 'worm' form is explicitly stated in the *Ynglingasaga*. A 'worm', however, need not be only a worm. The Germanic word *urm-, *orm- used to signify a worm, a snake or even a dragon, and indeed, these three beasts are closely related with each other. In a sense, the 'urm' idea expresses itself in three realms - the worms of the underworld, the serpents living on earth,

and the great celestial dragon of the upperworld. A serpent-transformation was recorded by Lonrot, and included in the *Kalevala*. Here we find the ancient seer-poet Vainamoinen travelling to the realm of Tuoni in search of words of power. Tuoni is a name of the realm of the dead, it is also a name of the lord of the dead. The people of Finland believed that Tuoni lived in a village, much like their own villages, on the dark island beyond the river of death. Vainamoinen met the daughters of Tuoni, as they were washing clothes in the river of death, and beguiled them to take him across. Arriving on the other shore, he soon learned that the land of the dead is entirely void of words. A queen of the dead, Tuonetar (Tuonetar was invented by Lonrot. The Finns believed in Tuoni, but knew no queen of the dead, while the Sami people had a queen of the dead, but no Tuoni), greeted the traveller and offered food and drink to refresh him:

Vainamoinen old and truthful
deeply gazed into the mug:
toads were spawning on the inside,
worms were creeping on the edges...

The seer refused politely. A great tiredness came over him, and while he slept, and his clothes stood guard, the son of Tuoni with his deformed hands and iron fingers cast a net across the river of death to trap the seer forever. Not with Vainamoinen! Waking from his sleep, the ancient singer assumed the form of a serpent:

Swiftly he transformed his nature,
fast he turned into another,
black of colour, slips to water,
slides as serpent through the sedges,
winds, a worm of iron colour,
twisting like a toxic serpent
swimming through the stream of deathland,
sliding through Tuoni's net.

190 Dragon Lore

The metal net that sought to confine the seer cannot hold the serpent, who escapes, and brings tidings from the deathland to the living. Transformation into serpent shape is a practice that seems to have been quite popular among the Noide-shamans of the Finnmark, as well as among the Juraksamojedes and several cultures of the Altai region.

Serpent images are an occasional symbol on the drums of the Noide, and the assumption of a serpent or fish form to travel to the realm of the dead is rather well attested. That such death-land journeys used to form an important part of north-land shamanism can be deduced from the expression 'Kayda Tuonelassa' which means 'becoming ecstatic' in Finnish. In older times, these words meant 'visiting the land of the dead' (Fromm, quoting Gananders *Nytt Finskt Lexicon*). The use of this expression implies that journeys to the land of the dead were a common practice in old Finland, and similar customs can easily be found in the *Edda* and a few Nordic sagas. Many shamans of Siberia received their initiation in the realm of the deceased, as well as the blessing of their ancestors and the ability to battle diseases. Now Vainamoinen discovered that the land of the dead contains no words of origin. May I propose that it contained a wisdom framed in a word-less tongue?

Odin and Vainamoinen are not the only shamanic travellers who used to enjoy the serpent shape. You may recall the myth of the Valkyrie, mentioned in the chapter on seidr. Several Nordic poems and sagas mention noble ladies who were able to assume the shape of some bird. In transformed consciousness, they flew to the battlefield to aid their husbands. It comes as no surprise that the dragon shape was equally assumed. In the *Bosasaga* you can read about a giant lady who used to assume dragon shape to fly across the country. More detailed is the *Thidrekssaga*, which details the doings of Lady Ostacia. To aid her husband, who was busy on the battlefield, Ostacia used serpent-sorcery:

She went out to work sorcery, as it happened in pagan times that women wise in sorcery, who were called Volvas, practised sorcery. Ostacia knew so much sorcery and troll-art that she conjured many

beasts around herself: lions, bears, and great flying dragons ... she herself was like a dragon in flight...

With her beasts and dragons, Lady Ostacia flew to the battlefield, and dealt death to many enemies, fighting with claws and teeth. So fierce was her dragon-rage that she won a victory for her kinsfolk, and when her husband came home from the slaughter, he found his spouse weak and wounded in bed.

We might continue with tales of serpent and dragon transformations for a while, but this would be misleading, as 'the serpent as a symbol for the soul' is only one notion among many which have clustered around the serpent-image. Serpents and dragons had many functions in the mythologies of ancient Europe, so many that we cannot limit ourselves to any single interpretation. Dragons could be a metaphor for the vehemence of natural forces, for instance. Some water dragons of Ireland were held responsible for sudden floods and deluges. An old alpine proverb says 'a dragon has come out' when a mountain stream overflows and changes its course, roaring across the mountain side, uprooting trees and dislodging great rocks in its trail of destruction. The idea of the fire-breathing dragon may have been influenced by the appearance of comets, or UFOs, if you like, and some dragons assumed the shape of the wide world itself. Icelandic mythology mentions the 'world-serpent' a snake of such monstrous size that it surrounds the entire earth, and bites its own tail, which may be painful but nourishing. This great ophidian monster feeds on itself, which is a matter that ought to be kept in mind. Does not the all-self feed upon itself in a similar manner? Some dragons were thought to be guardians of great hoards and fabled treasures, such as the dragon-giant Fafner, or that dragon which slew Beowulf. Serpents, poisonous or not, emerge from the earth or lie hidden in the heather. These often became symbols for danger, for death, and for the transformations which lead beyond. In Scots folklore, we find reference to 'the daughter of Ivor', 'the noble queen' who lies hidden in the heather, awaiting the careless step of the traveller. Brown she is, with finely scaled skin and unblinking eyes that

192 Dragon Lore

glow like embers. Sensuous her motion, flickering the tongue, as she hisses and whistles in the dun-coloured growth. Alexander Carmichael (1900) recorded a ritual which was practised in the highlands of Scotland on the Day of Bride. Early in the morning, people used to go out to chant a certain rune:

Early on Brides morn
The serpent shall come from the hole,
I will not molest the serpent,
Nor will the serpent molest me.

Several variations of this rhyme have been recorded. One of them even states that:

The serpent will come from the hole
On the brown Day of Bride
Though there should be three feet of snow
On the flat surface of the ground.

Now the feast day of Bride, who is a deity of fire, and as such a guardian of the house-fire, the smithy-fire and the fire of poetic inspiration, is on the day called 'Candlemass' or 'Imbolc' at the beginning of February. This is theoretically the beginning of spring in several Celtic cultures, which goes to show that 'spring' meant the struggle between the warm and cold forces. Bride, with her white wand, breathes fresh life into the 'dead quarter' of the year, and begins a spring time which ends when the forests erupt in maytime green. February is a cold month clad in snow and ice, and in the dark and silent forest, death comes as frost and starvation to the beasts of the wild. In this time of the year, serpents tend to lie deep down in their earth-holes, stiff and lifeless in their hibernation. What would you make of a serpent-evocation uttered habitually in a season when self-respecting serpents stay asleep below the frozen soil? As the rune was meant to protect the speaker for the rest of the year, it may well be that the non-appearance of Ivor's daughter was taken as a good sign. If the crafty highlanders had really desired to see a snake come to their call, they would have performed the rite in warm summer, when serpents can often be found in the heather. Thus, the rite is characterised by an ambiguous atmos-

phere involving equal shares of respect, sympathy and fear. This mood is commonly found in folk-practices relating to serpents.

Before we continue to explore the mythological complexities of dragon and serpent magick, I would like to show you some samples of artwork. These, I hope, will tell you more than my crude explanations can, as pictures touch levels of consciousness which cannot be contacted by words on their own. Dragons and serpents come in countless forms and varieties. Now snakes can be found and observed in nature, but the more fantastic dragons, well known for claws, wings and burning breath, can best be observed in the astral (i.e. the imagination). 'Draco imaginaria' is a creature that does not live on earth; it comes out of the impossible and makes its home in creative madness. Dragons are not meant to be 'real' in the usual sense of the word; they find their reality in the changes they produce, in the minds they inspire, in the dreams that manifest their timeless beauty.

The Chinese, who have always loved the dragon image, claim that you can never see a dragon completely. By the time you have gazed all the way from head to tail the dragon has transformed, and so have you.

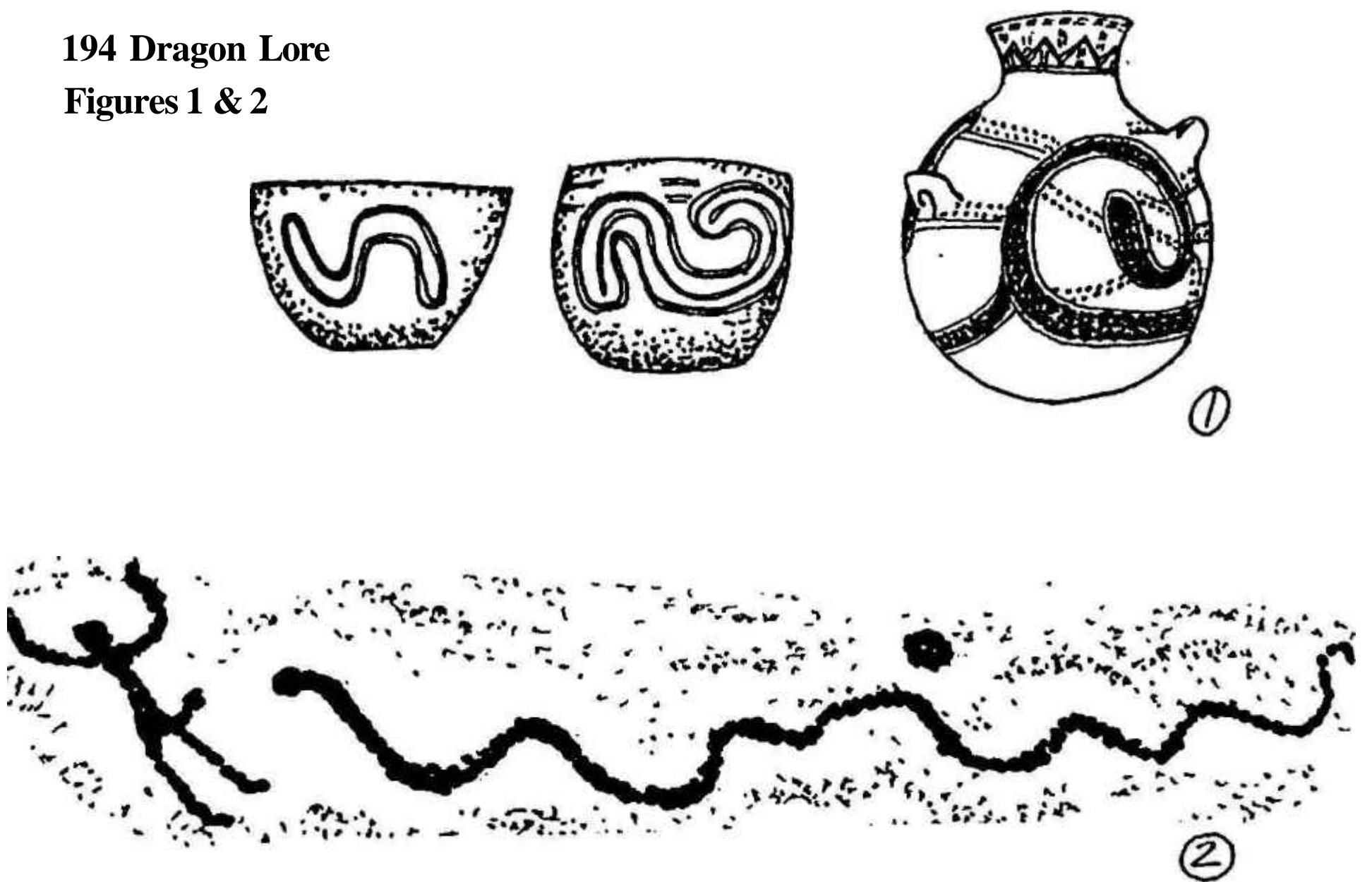
Where do the oldest dragon-serpent images come from? European Stone Age art shows few reptiles, arguably because during the Ice Ages northern Europe was too cold for reptiles. There are a number of serpentine forms in cave art, and indeed the so-called 'Makkaroni-style' derives its name from them. The cave of Rouffignac shows some excellent examples of meandering shapes, be they serpents, rivers or noodles, which were scratched into the red rock. Likewise, a couple of - wavy-line symbols appear in carvings from Palaeolithic Siberia which defy interpretation as they are so abstract.

Snake-images become more common with the thawing of the ice and the advent of warmer weather. By the time of the first farming communities in central Europe (c. 5000 BC) distinct serpent images can be observed on pottery, plus a number of related symbols, such as the s-spiral, which came to be closely associated with serpents, dragons and the like.

In picture 1, you can see some clay vessels with variations of the S-

194 Dragon Lore

Figures 1 & 2



spiral and the serpent image. They come from the early farming communities in Hessen, Germany, of whom (apart from their pottery) very little is known.

Our next sample, picture 2, comes from Neolithic Sweden. Agriculture was practised in Scandinavia by 3,500 BC, perhaps earlier, and those farmers were kind enough to leave an extensive collection of rock engravings on stone that had been polished by the motion of the ice. Bohuslan is perhaps the best known site for such images, which include countless representations of ships, sleighs, crossed circles, warriors, musicians, and any amount of animals. On several rocks serpent images appear. When compared to the other animals around them, these serpents seem to be rather huge, and capable of eating humans or bulls. Of course, there have been no giant serpents in Scandinavia at the time, which may indicate that we are dealing with *fantastic* serpents, and not real ones. The size of the images may be meant to show how important these snakes were. Note the man standing before the snake. A couple of over-enthusiastic scholars have interpreted it as an image of the God Thor who is well known for his frequent fights with the world-

surrounding serpent. It is a rather moot point if Thor was known in Scandinavia around 3000 BC. Also, the figure lacks Thor's favourite weapon, the hammer, and has an erect penis instead (so much for symbolism!). We know that Thor loathed the world serpent, while the man in the picture seems to fancy it.

Number 3 shows two pictures of what might be serpents or dragons. They come from the Alta Fjord, Norway, not far from the north-cap, where a great many stone engraved images have survived the millennia under a protective layer of moss. Both serpents have been carved with stone hammers. They date between 2700 and 1700 BC. Some time, not necessarily at the time of their making, people deemed it wise to carve a line across them which effectively cuts them in two. This may be the earliest sample of serpent-image persecution in northern Europe. The snake at the bottom, by the way, is only part of a much bigger design.

Alpine art, with its thousands of petroglyphs, also features serpents. These are not a common element, and are generally dated to the early Iron Age. Some of them have trident shaped heads. Their bodies show some variety as spirals, meanders, waves and other shapes can be found. Folk legend associates numerous alpine lakes with dragons who guard treasure in the deep.

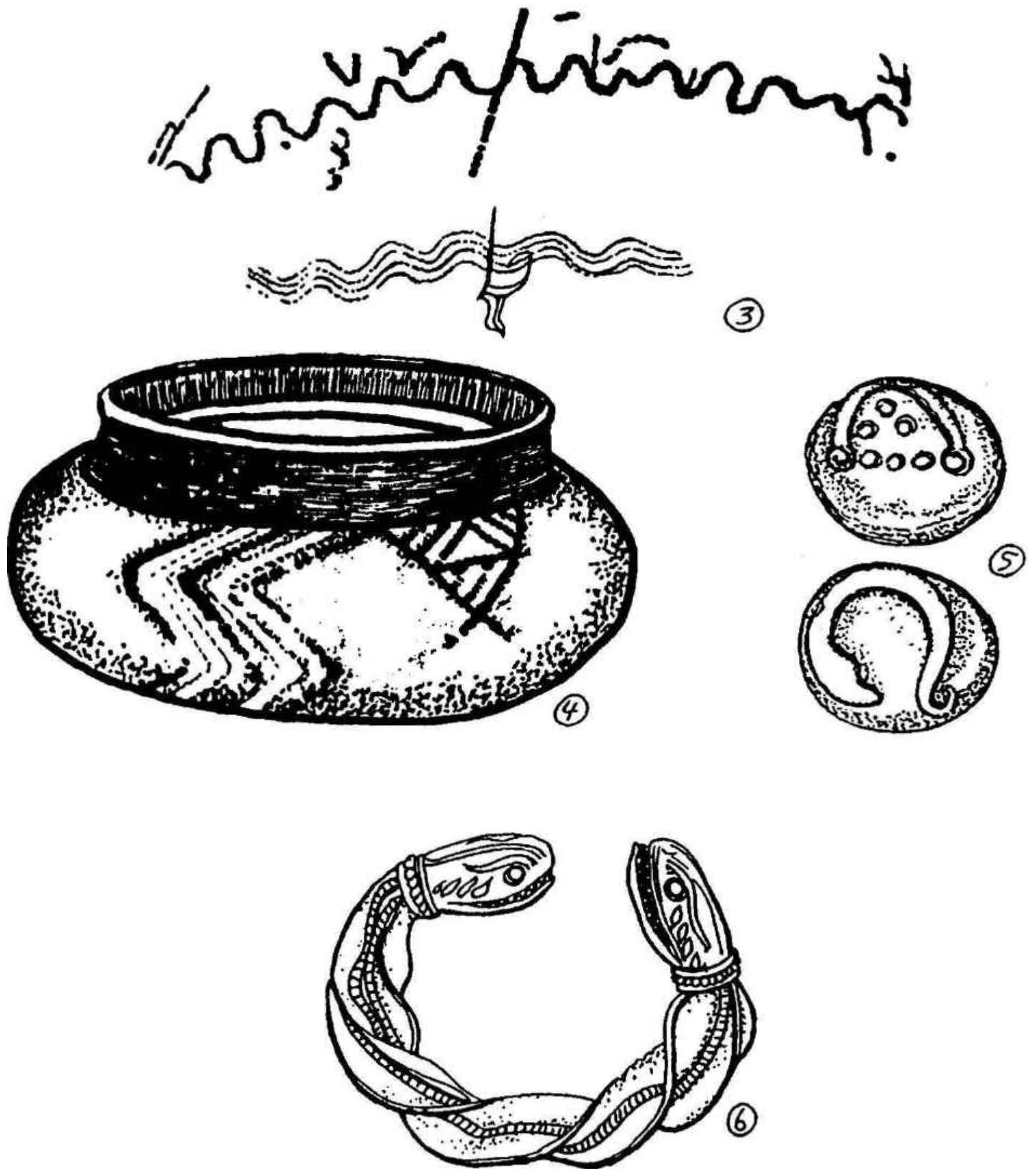
With the Celtic period, serpents become more common. Here in picture 4 you can see an early example, Hallstatt period (c. 800-500 BC) from Burglengenfeld, Bavaria. The clay vessel shows a simplified serpent in black and cream-white lines on rich red ochre.

From the Bohemian Celtic people comes the gold coin shown in picture 5. One side is graced with what seems to be a serpent image. The reverse side shows what may be a rainbow, or a cauldron containing circles. If Celtic serpents are associated with rain and rainbows, as is common in African and West Indian Voodoo, this fact has evaded the attention of historians. More likely is the association with cauldrons and vessels, which can be traced in a number of Celtic and Germanic folk tales.

Picture 6 shows a heavy gold bracelet, one of a pair, which has been found among other treasures in Zurich, Switzerland. The bracelets

196 Dragon Lore

show rather vicious and realistic serpent heads. Note that the bracelets are twisted, much as certain torques (neck-rings) were. They are the work of Helvetic Celts, who found much of their gold in the alpine rivers and streams. The hoard from Zurich was buried around 150 AD. It also



Figs. 3, 4, 5, & 6

included a finger ring with two serpent heads.

In picture seven we have fragments of two interesting Celtic fibula from Hessen, Germany. A fibula is a sort of heavy-duty safety pin, often highly ornamental, which was commonly used to close cloaks over the right shoulder. The one on the left comes from the Taunus mountains, where it was found in one of the major ringwall sanctuaries on a mountain top. Dating from c. 450 BC, it shows a fantastic creature which seems to be a blend of lizard, frog, newt and a snake, while its tail transforms into the neck and head of a swan. Also, this draconian creature has some distinct similarity to a penis, which should give you enough material to speculate for hours. Not far from the height where the fibula was unearthed, in a dark and narrow valley was a forest called the 'Sehatterswald' in the old days. 'The forest of the Chatti-people' would be one translation, or better still 'the forest of shadows'. A small stream winds down the slopes, through rocks and fern and shady trees, and where the twilight is densest, a dragon used to live. So it says in a local folk-tale (see *Taunus sagen*), which is as good evidence as any. If you become very quiet and send your awareness deep into the dark earth you may find that the dragon is still there - and not only in that valley, but also anywhere else that you might care to look.

The fibula shown on the right (c. 500 BC) also shows some serpentine form. It may have been a serpent, dragon or worm long ago (or another distorted swan) but the item is too old and worn to be sure. It was found in a barrow near Rudesheim/Rhein. The centre of the fibula shows one of the many enigmatic heads that used to grace Celtic art and living rooms, and on the side, the somewhat abstract shape of a boar-head. My guess would be a summer boar - when the wild boars have no winter-coat, and their heads appear much sleeker. It would be nice

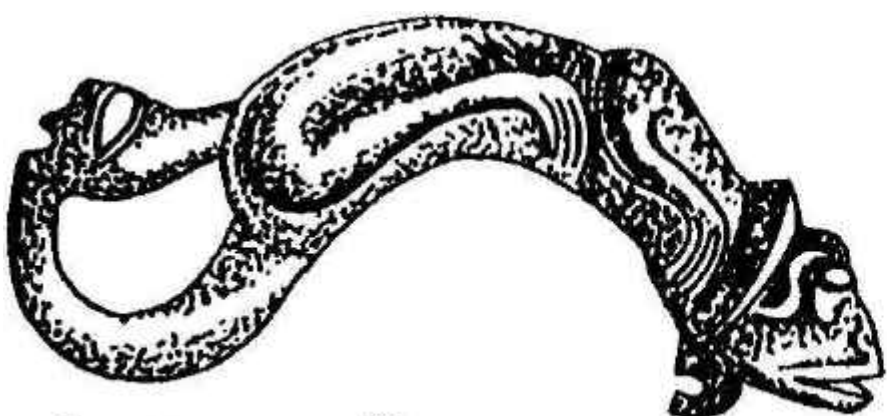


fig. 7

Taunus



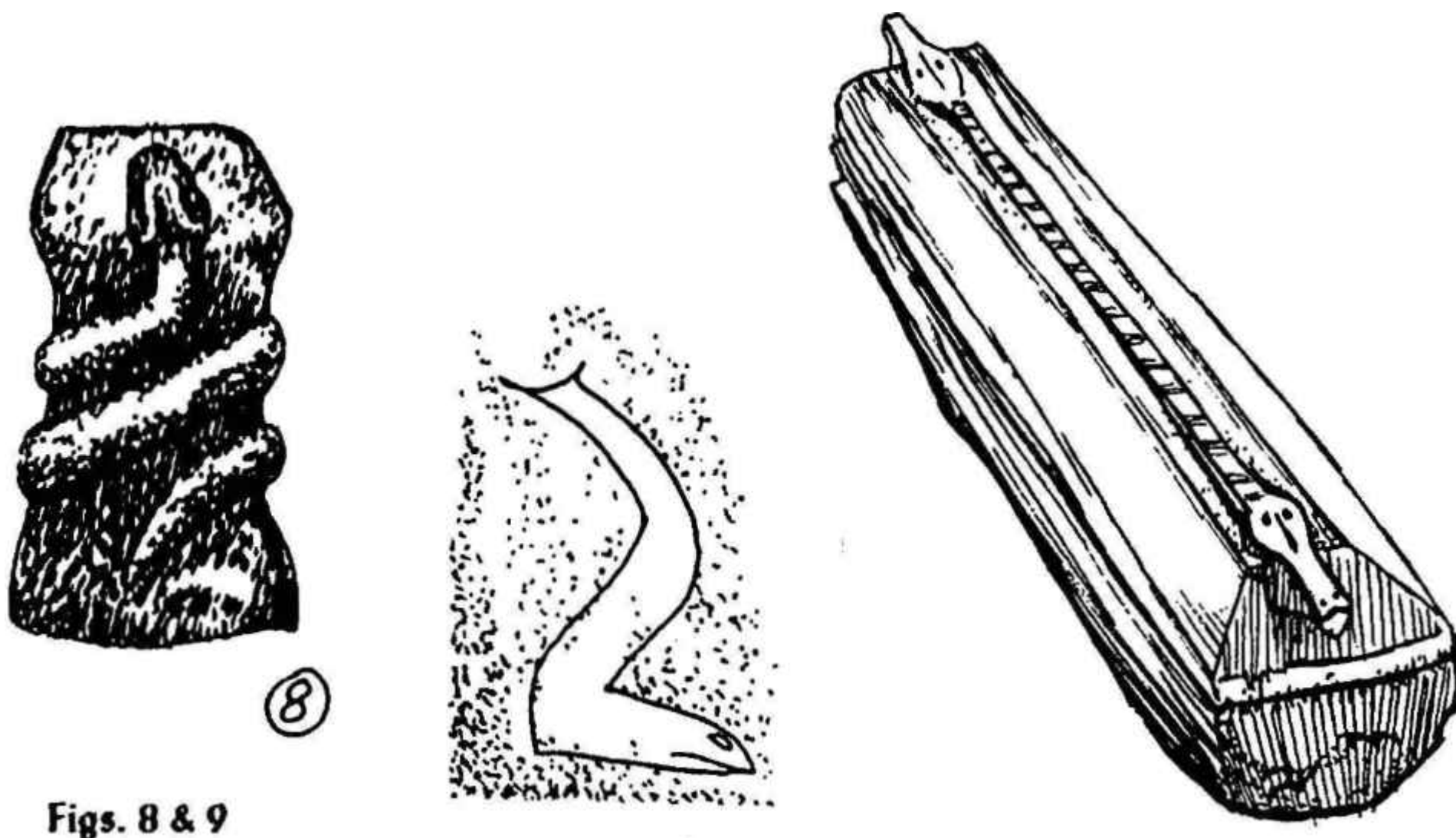
Rüdesheim

198 Dragon Lore

to assume that this fibula reflects a continental version of the island-Celtic Vitiris-cult, with its totem-animals serpent and boar. Such speculation, however, cannot be proved. Your guess is as good as anyone's.

Picture eight is an altar with a serpent design, dedicated to the Celtic deity Vitiris from Lypiatt Park in Gloucestershire. Right next to it is another serpent (or fish?) from a Vitiris altar in Carvoran, Northumberland. The nature of Vitiris offers riddles to all researchers. The deity was rather popular in Britain once and a number of altars and inscriptions have survived. Several of them show serpents, sometimes in association with wild boars, and no doubt both of them had their place in the myths and rituals of the deity. Apart from his association with serpents and boars, next to nothing is known of Vitiris. Strange as it may sound, there is a subtle connection between serpent-dragon and wild boars. In the next chapter you may be surprised to discover that honey mead can turn fighting dragons into happy little pigs.

Here is an item that ought to remind you of King Guntram's soul-serpent. What you see in picture 9 is a rough wooden coffin, the sort you get when you hollow a tree trunk. It was found in an Alamannic



Figs. 8 & 9

grave in Oberflacht, Wurttemberg, Germany, and dates around 600 AD. A two-headed serpent stretches along the length of the wood. Should we consider this serpent as a soul animal, as a guardian of the deceased or simply as a glyph of the realm of the dead? Be that as it may, the coffin is an unusual one and its owner was probably a Pagan.

Picture 10 is also a Scandinavian example. The little bronze dragon was part of the Faardal treasure, Jutland. Originally it may have been part of a small bronze wagon. Note that this dragon serpent shows a horn (or plume?) coming out of its head. Horned serpents became a fashion at a much later time with the Urn-field people and the Celts (which developed out of them). This sample, from the middle or late Bronze Age, is considerably older.

An early example of Scandinavian dragon-serpents (picture 11) comes from the Stone of Havor, Sweden, c. 400-600 AD. Here, the serpents show an ornamental shape much like the S-spirals which occur so frequently in Megalithic, Celtic and Germanic

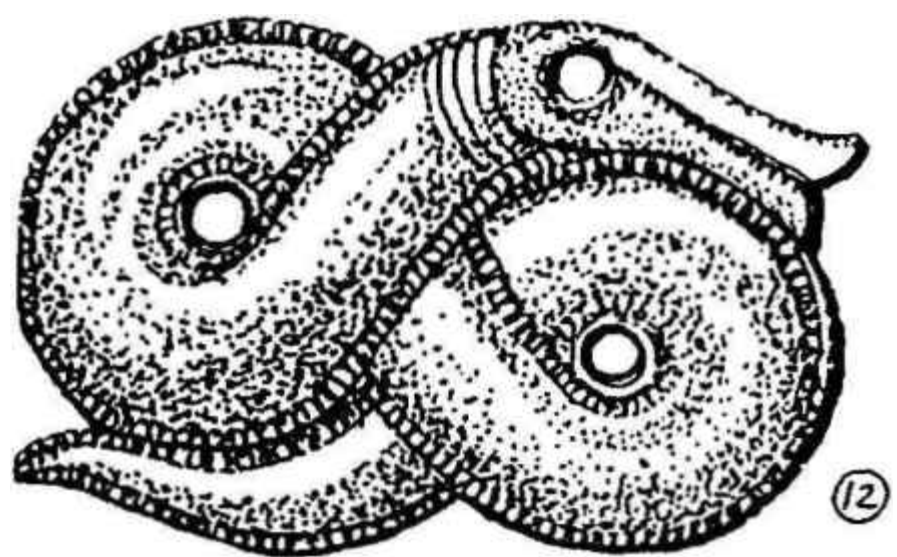
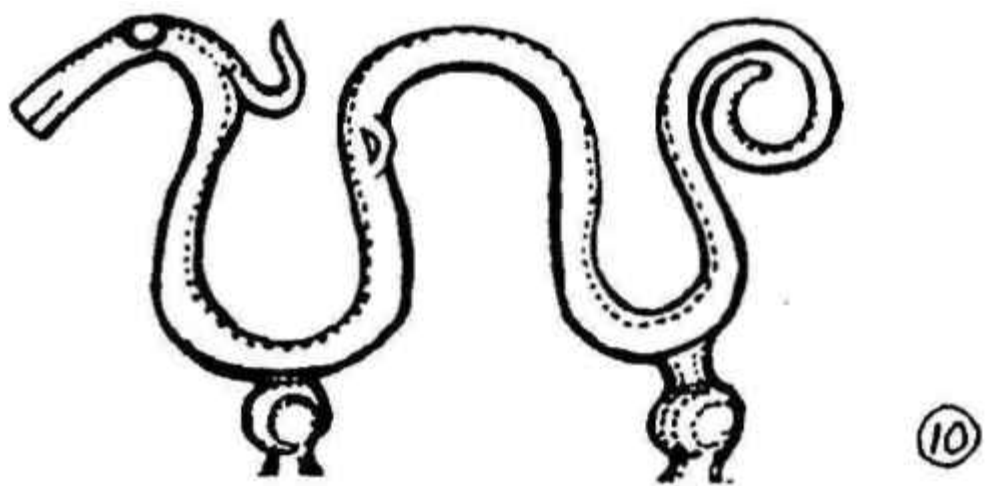


Fig. 10,11 & 12

200 Dragon Lore

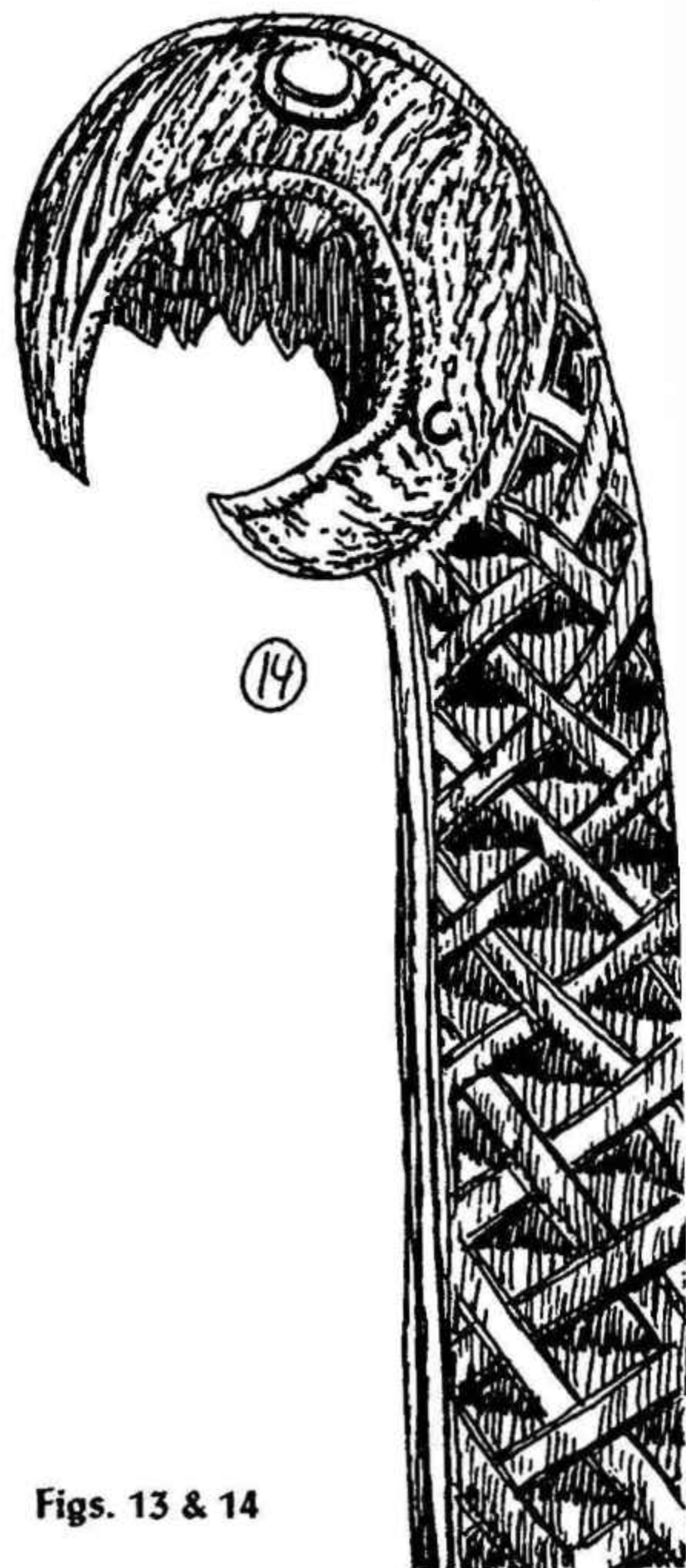
art. Note that this variety does not exhibit a balanced s-spiral, but one which has a small top (and head) and a much heavier bottom. We might interpret this by saying that the larger part of the serpent is still pulsing in the deep. Quite interestingly, the S-spiral is still one of the most popular designs found in peasant-style painting in central Europe.

In picture 12 you can see a 7th century brooch from Oland, Sweden. Jewellery sporting dragon or snake images, often based on the S-spiral or the figure 8, was highly fashionable in pre-Christian Scandinavia. Dragon serpents are undoubtedly among the most popular images in north Germanic art. Think of the far travelling 'dragon ships' of the Vikings! It seems that these rugged vessels sported a big dragon head on the prow when the ships travelled with war-like intentions. For peaceful trading, the dragon head could be detached.

Picture 13 shows such a wooden dragon's head. It is carved in Norwegian style, probably 10th century, and has been found at Usedom, German Baltic. This dragon is interesting as it closely resembles a boar. Note the upper



13



Figs. 13 & 14

tusks, which were originally painted white. If you turn the picture sideways, one of the tusks turns into an eye, and the dragon's head becomes a sitting person. This person wears a hat, has bracelets (or tattoos?) on upper and lower arms and seems to be holding a cup or shallow dish full of draconian elixirs - cheers!

Picture 14 shows a similar item. This dragon-head is also in Viking style. It was found in the Schelde-river estuary. As they are so well known, I have refrained from giving further samples of dragon-prows. Some excellent examples can be found in the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo. Most impressive among these is the Oseberg-ship (early 9th century) which was used for the burial of a queen - possibly the feared Queen Asa, grandmother of Harald Fair-Hair. Interpreting this ship would suffice to fill an entire book, as Queen Asa journeyed to the otherworld in a wealth of draconian images, grinning monsters and coiling serpents. You'll find pictures of these in most books on the Vikings.

This image, number fifteen, is rather remarkable as it shows ornamental serpents with (what seems to be) the heads of wolves. The design comes from the Gosforth Cross, blending Christian and pagan ideas. It is not usual for such animals to combine in one image, as each has its own distinct mythos. However, there is an obscure connection between them. In the prose *Edda* (Gylf. 34), Snorri tells us that lusty Loki and the giant lady Angurboda (messenger of fear) had three children: the underworld goddess Hel, the world-surrounding serpent Jormungandr, and the Fenris wolf, devourer of the world in the dying of the regents (see *Helrunar*, page 54-57 for various catastrophe theories). These three form a sinister trinity in Icelandic mythology, and if one of them swaps head with another, it's still all in the family.

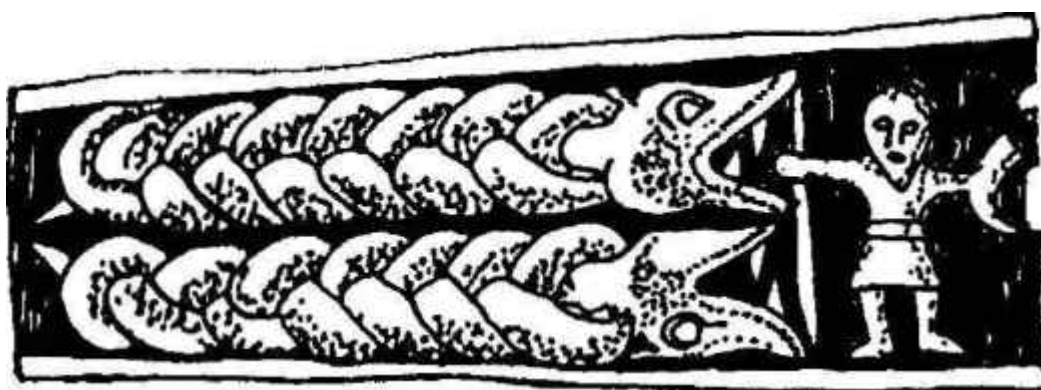


Fig.15

202 Dragon Lore

Another interpretation would consider the serpentine bodies as rather abstract images of grains. This brings the corn-wolf, or grain-wolf to mind (see Frazer's *Golden Bough*) - one of the none-too-friendly grain spirits that used to stalk the fields. It is a good question what the person (god or hero?) on the left is doing. Does he use a spear to block the

Fig. 16 rune stone
from Uppsala,
c. 1000-1150

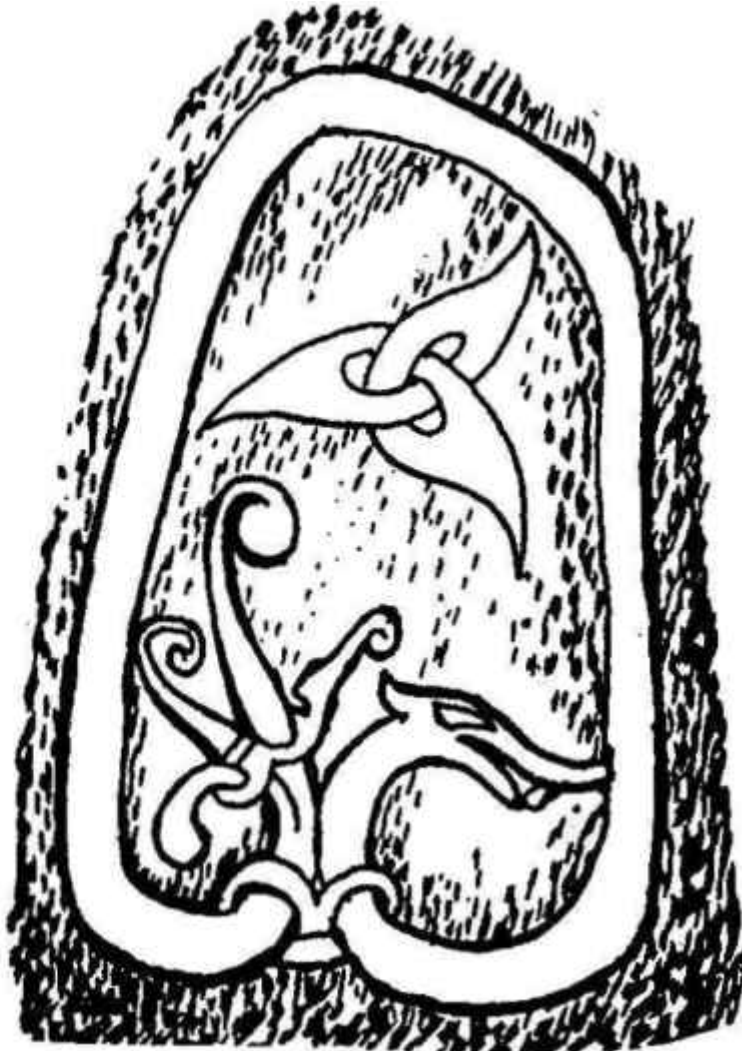


Fig. 17 (left)
rune stone
from Fröso,
c. 1000

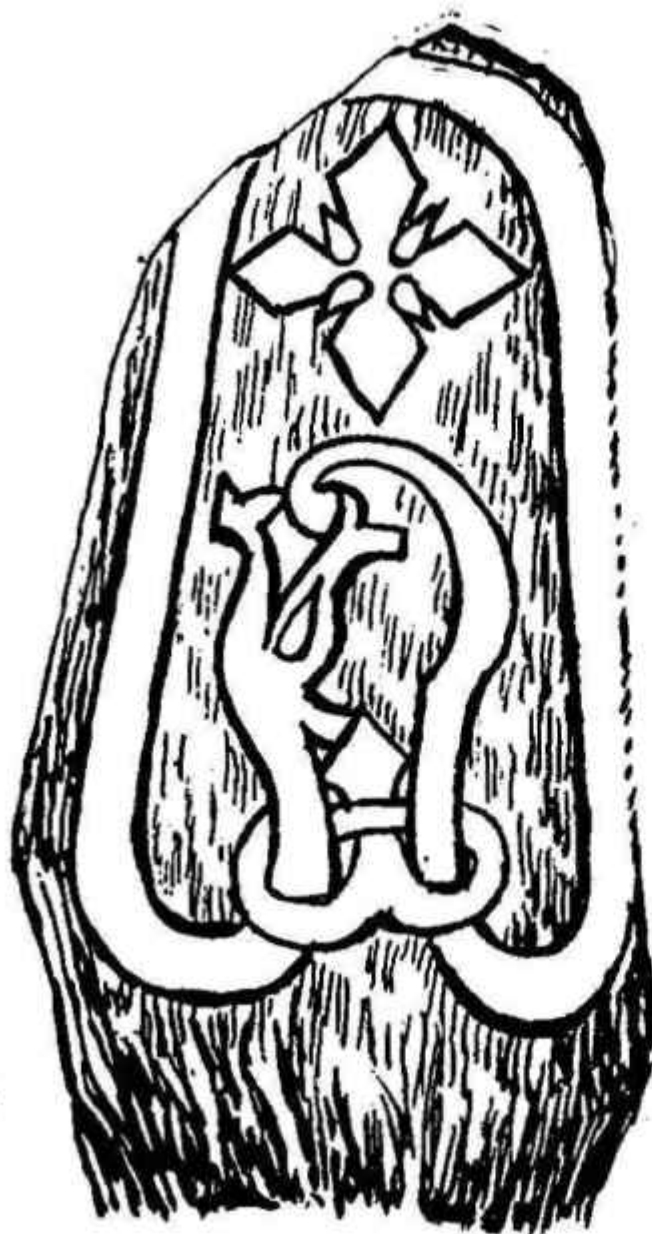


Fig. 18 (right)
rune stone
from Tingstad,
Östergötland,
c. 1000



passage of the forces of evil? The spear might suggest Odin, whose major weapon is a spear, and who was slain by the wolf at the end of time. What would you make out of the drinking horn? For one thing, dragon-serpents are often associated with elixirs - be it as honey mead, as the mead of inspiration, or as some lethal poison. For another, it was obviously a rough job to block the path of the serpents. 'Having a drink' may have been part of the rite.

Pictures 16-18 shows three samples of dragon images from Swedish rune stones.

Rune stones are far from rare in Scandinavia. During the Viking age (c. 800-1200), and with the advent of the peculiar 16 rune futhark, a fashion for memorial stones developed (see *Helrunar*). To this day there are hundreds of large rocks bearing rune inscriptions, and most of these are very dull indeed. Usually such rocks reveal for whom they were erected, who paid for the work, and who carved the words into the stone. The last bit was often the biggest, as those 'rock-smiths' were not only expensive but also proud of their skills, and preferred to sign their names in a rather grandiose fashion. To give a shape to the words, the inscription was commonly carved between two lines which formed the body of one or more serpent-dragons. In these illustrations, I have left out the rune inscription so the dragons came out more clearly. Such memorial stones were most popular when Scandinavia was already semi-Christian. Many of the heroes mentioned on such rocks believed in an uneasy blend of Pagan and Christian ideas. They enjoyed the barbaric beauty of the old serpent image, but paid a certain lip service to the Christian creed by showing the dragon bound. A few of the earlier stones include images suggesting the various Pagan trinities but most of them show cross-signs which could be Christian, Pagan or both. As Christianity became stronger, the dragon images were occasionally simplified or turned into a simple meandering band to accommodate the inscription.

As you have seen in the last pages, there is a great amount of variation among the various dragons and serpents in ancient Pagan

204 Dragon Lore

Europe. Dragons and their kin appear in many times and places. Dragons were so popular in ancient Europe that they became a symbol of evil paganism once the Christian church had come to power. It is certainly not unusual to find churches near or on old cult places. Often enough, these show an image of Mary, Christ, the Archangel Michael or St. George in the act of stepping on a dragon/snake. Now the earliest 'Christian' communities, as the *Qumran* texts show, were already violently opposed to the serpent symbol. Serpents, and spirits with the heads of serpents, were seen as emissaries of their supreme devil Belial. When the first Christian missionaries arrived in northern Europe, they found a wealth of Pagan dragon/serpents which must have appeared to them like a sign of evil.

Which raises an interesting question, was there a draconian cult in ancient Europe? Cult or not, dragon serpents were popular, and no doubt they meant a good many different things in various lands and ages. Readers familiar with the work of Kenneth Grant may be aware of a phenomenon called 'the draconian tradition'. I do not intend to discuss the many cults that Grant classes as 'draconian' in these pages. Suffice it to say that a good many of the symbols and practises of these cults can also be found in the Pagan magick of ancient Europe. There are a number of key elements to what we might call 'draconian magick', and these elements are not only traceable in the ancient European cults, but glaringly obvious once one adds up those darksome bits of data that so many scholars have chosen to ignore. Before we can examine this obscure material, I would like to summarise a few points about the 'draconian tradition', as the word is used by Grant and a number of Thelemites. Keep in mind the symbols which we explored in the last pages. Think of the boars and wolves associated with dragons, the glyph of the cauldron, chalice or drinking horn, the lore of toxic elixirs that usually clings to serpents. Think of the dark goddess of the underworld, with her halls full of coiling snakes, and ask yourself why a Viking might feel inclined to have his name carved within a serpent shape, as happened so often on the Scandinavian rune stones. Last, think of the celestial dragon, Draco, in the height of heaven amidst the summer stars.



16 A Tangle of Serpents

In the glossary of *Cults of the Shadow*, Kenneth Grant offers the following description of 'draconian cult':

The full flowering of the primal African mysteries as it occurred in ancient Egypt in pre-monumental times. It is the cult of the fire snake represented celestially by the stellar complex, Draco, the dragon or fire-breathing beast of the great deep (of space). Draco is identical with the goddess Kali of the later tantrik cults of the left hand path. The draconian cult is also alluded to as the ophidian current, when no specifically Egyptian reference is intended.

Indeed, the draconian tradition is nothing new. As a mode of worship it goes back a long way in history, to a period when, as it is claimed, the polar star was within the constellation of Draco, the dragon. The independent scholar and poet Gerald Massey compared the earliest traces of Egyptian religion to those of ancient Africa, and thought that there was once a time when Egyptian religion and magic were quite distinct from the classical form. Massey assumed that there were at least four stages in the development of Egyptian religion. The earliest stage was characterised by stellar cults, and by the common use of zoomorphic, i.e. animal-shaped deities, which makes it likely that these religions were founded on the techniques of Palaeolithic beast-form shamanism. The second stage was characterised by lunar cults, and by a lunar mode of time-keeping. In the third stage, lunar and solar cults seem to have existed side by side, and in the fourth stage, the solar,

and male-oriented cults of Osiris and Ammon became dominant, leading to a persecution of the older cults, who were generally considered 'evil' and 'unclean'. These solar cults were quite efficient in erasing many of the memories of earlier cults, so that the little we know of the draconian cults comes from the bits and pieces the solarites overlooked. It should be noted that most known Egyptian literature, as well as the great monuments, comes from religions that were already deep into solar worship. These retained a few traces of the older cults, such as the popularity of beast-headed deities. As a rule, these bestial gods come from the earliest traditions. Specific bestial gods are intimately connected with draconian worship, such as dragons, serpents, pigs, spiders, jackals, dogs, vultures and many others. These were worshipped for their peculiar magical qualities by the early cults, and were deemed evil (for the very same qualities) by the later solar religions. A special method in draconian worship was the use of fluids, secretions and excrement in magick, and indeed the greatest sacraments of the time were the fluids collected and refined within the chalice of the ecstatic priestess. While the draconian cults saw these substances as a sacred key to the manifestation of entities that came from the stars, the solarites of later ages took a different view, and persecuted the draconians with vehemence. The prime menstruum of draconian magick ('the best blood is of the moon, monthly' *Al. Ill*, 24) was considered accursed by them, and menstruation became an 'evil' and 'dangerous' phenomena. It may say something about the potency of this ruby elixir when you consider how many cultures of our enlightened age are terrified of the stuff, believe that menstruating women are 'dirty', and banish them from public life for the 'dangerous days'.

It is not only sexual fluids, however, which were used by the draconian adepts in their peculiar rites of stellar worship. Come to think of it, these people seem to have used just about every elixir the body can produce. Traces of these customs can be observed to this day. Witness the use of magically produced sweat in the healing dances of the San people, or the Taoist methods of charging spittle with energies and colours.

208 A Tangle of Serpents

Another important theme in the draconian cults is the influence from outside. We can consider these cults as a development of early Stone Age religions, and these bring us to the topic of 'the ancient ones'. According to many mythologies, mankind did not originate on earth but came to earth from outside. Several African myths, and their West Indian Voodoo counterparts, claim that a huge serpent brought humans to earth. This 'serpent of the sky', well known as Da, Dan, or Danballah, represents the eldest of the gods. As the legends have it, the heavenly serpent landed in Africa, where it vomited, and released its passengers. Then it crawled into some lake or mountain where it sleeps in the depth. Occasionally, the old serpent is petitioned to bring rain from heaven.

It is an interesting fact that Voodoo serviteurs, when they are 'mounted' (obsessed) by Danballah, show all sorts of characteristic serpent behaviour. They hiss and sway, crawl on the ground, devour eggs and occasionally they climb trees with great skill. This event may be seen as symbolising the old serpents yearning for heaven, for the stellar realm beyond and outside. Danballah, being such an old god, is not very much concerned with human problems. Where other loa are ready to offer advice or to bless a lottery ticket, Danballah sways, hisses and remains silent. In a sense, Danballah can be seen as a key to a realm that antedates humanity as we know it, as a guardian of the stellar abyss from which we came and to which we may return if we will.

Is it just coincidence that several cultures living in the rain-drenched forests of the Amazon believe in a huge anaconda spirit which brought humanity to this planet? What of the Australian aborigines and their veneration of the ancient rainbow-serpent Pulwaiya ('father's father') who appears from the height in rain, lightning and thunder and who creates the path by which a human soul may enter the mother's womb? In Australian mythology, the rainbow serpent can function as a gate to the height, and to the primal realm outside our world. Similarly the Vikings saw the rainbow as a bridge leading to Asgard, the world of the gods. With the Dogon people of West Africa, it was not a snake but a great celestial crocodile which carried humans to this planet. In all of these myths, you find dragon/serpents between the world of men and

the alien realm outside. These animals, and the humans they carry, are considered to be of extra-terrestrial origin.

In this place, I would like to remind you of the dragons of the north Germanic cultures. The *Edda* mentions the greatest of them all, the world-encircling serpent Jormungandr ('world-surrounders') who is said to be one of the children that devious Loki had with the giant lady Angurboda ('messenger of fear'). When Odin saw it, he

...hurled the serpent into the deep ocean, which surrounds all countries, where the serpent grew to such size that it lies deep in the sea, surrounding all lands, and bites its own tail. *Gylf.* 34

The well known sportsman and giant-slayer Thor tried to kill this serpent repeatedly. At the end of time, in the 'twilight of the regents', he almost succeeded, and wounded the snake mortally. The *Edda* tells us that while the snake sank beneath the waves, brave Thor walked nine steps, an eternity in itself, before the serpent's poison finished him off. In the day of Ragnarok, the forces of order and chaos cancel each other out. A similar creature, 'the Leviathan that encircles the world' is mentioned in the Irish tale of *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*. The world serpent has been considered as a symbol of limitation by some scholars, who emphasised that it contains the world in its embrace. I suggest that the serpent functions not only as a thing but also



Rock-art from Karelia. A half human shaman rides a snake

210 A Tangle of Serpents

an absence, and that the practising magician considers it not as an end, but as a gate to the outside. As happens so often in draconian magick, the guardian of the gate and the gate are the same phenomenon.

The great age of the dragon/serpent directly connects it with a class of beings which appear under a number of names in mythology. Most European mythologies claim that, before the gods came to rule and order the world, a race of older entities, often called 'giants', 'titans', 'monsters' etc., used to take their pleasure among the living. The 'ancient ones' of the Lovecraftian mythos appear in many mythologies as the divine and chaotic beings of the beginning. A lively example can be found in the old Sumerian and Babylonian legends. In the *Song of the Creation of the World* which was composed c. 2000 BC, and a copy of which, dated c. 650 BC has come to us, the world begins with a primal void:

At that age, before all ages, heaven above had no name, earth below had no word. The ancient forces Apsu (the abyss) and Mummu Tiamat (the chaos dragon) met in the void. They united and mixed their fluids. From this union a host of chaos creatures were spawned, and after a while, the first of the gods. Then followed other gods, and soon enough these new gods were wandering all over the place, loud and frivolous, demanding worship and upsetting the ancient order of the world. It was not long before a mate (and child) of Tiamat, the demon-prince Kingu, demanded that this new plague ought to be controlled or fought. A battle begins, and the hosts of the old ones are described in vivid detail:

The mother of chaos, who has formed everything
Gave firm weapons, spawned giant serpents,
Sharp of tooth and without mercy,
Filling their bodies with poison, not blood.
Raving dragons of fierce appearance
Strong in terror; she made them evolve:
Whoever saw them was paralysed,
There was no resistance to their rearing bodies.
Into the field she led adders, basilisks and salamanders,
Raving dogs, whirling winds and scorpion-people,

Terrible storms, fish-humans and rams of the sea;
 With weapons of wrath, not afraid of the fight.

(translation based on A. Ungnad)

Accompanied by eleven breeds of chaos-creatures, Tiamat sets out to fight the young gods. These, however, arm the axe-wielding god Marduk with a 'wind of destruction', and when the armies clash, the wind splits old Tiamat in twain. Marduk victorious divides her body with his axe, and orders the world. The blood of the slain serpent becomes the ocean, the lower half of her body turns to earth while the upper half is lifted up and turned into the skies. It is the young gods, the gods of reason and order, who divide the ancient chaotic unity into separate units. In Sumerian mythology, all of the world and all of the gods originated in the primal serpent, and the same could be said of human beings, who were shaped out of the flesh and blood of Tiamat. Greek mythology has Zeus, the lightning wielder, storm Mount Olympus, where he conquers the Titans, who were an elder race of gods.

In Icelandic mythology we find Thor, with his lightning hammer, happily fighting the elder giant races. Can you see the common structure in these legends? In each of these tales, a young god destroys or conquers a group of older gods, who are usually described as primitive, chaotic or evil (by worshippers of the young god). Often enough, the new gods' authority to rule is derived from these older deities. Think of the Titan Prometheus who carried fire from heaven. Zeus punished him for this deed by chaining him to Mount Caucasus. Every day Zeus sends out his eagle totem to eat Prometheus' liver, i.e. the ruling god feeds on the older deity.

The tale of Tiamat and Marduk has its parallel in the Greek legends of Medusa and Perseus. The gorgon Medusa appears as a horrid creature in most legends, with hair full of serpents and eyes that open like tunnels into the void. Her face enchants with its beauty, her glance stops time and petrifies. Many old deities became 'devils' when new cults were violently introduced. That Medusa once had a cult can be assumed from the temple she shared with Artemis in Corfu. A magnificent image of the deity can be seen in Corfu Museum. Likewise, there



are Medusa images in Etruscan tombs. Medusa heads graced the huge bronze vessel found in the grave of a Celtic noblewoman in the French village Vix. This vessel was a Greek import. With its height of 1.64m and its capacity to hold 1200 litres it is the biggest known from antiquity and must have cost the lady of Vix a treasure. As her grave contained more wealth than any other Gaulish tomb, she could probably afford it. These indicate that Medusa was once a frightening, but also beneficial goddess.

One legend claims that Medusa was originally a priestess of Athena. At that time, Athena, goddess of war and wisdom, and Poseidon, god of the great deep, were at odds with each other. Athena was really upset when she learned that Poseidon had courted her priestess Medusa, and that the union on the foam-washed beach had made Medusa instantly semi-divine and more beautiful than ever. For this misdeed, Athena cursed her, so that whoever looked into the eyes of the Medusa would instantly be petrified. Well, I won't give the full tale of Perseus' career and the slaying of Medusa in this place. Suffice it to say that Perseus uses a mirror to see her, and cuts off her head before she can harm him. It is an interesting detail that, once her head is severed, a fountain of blood erupts, and out of her throat her children are born: Chrysaor of the golden sickle, and Pegasus, horse of inspiration. Then the goddess Athena came to collect the leftovers. She attached the gorgon's head to her shield, to be more terrifying, and gathered the blood in two vessels. The blood from the left side of Medusa could restore the dead to life, and heal all diseases. The blood from the right side had the opposite effect, and destroyed instantly. One legend states that Athena kept the lethal blood for her own uses, and gave the healing blood to Asclepius, who became the god of healers.

All of these symbols hint at an ancient and draconian origin of the Medusa cult. I suspect that Medusa is the older deity, and that Athena came to collect the bits and pieces of the slain serpent-goddess to bolster her own authority and prestige. In practice, I have found Medusa-Satalie a goddess of great relevance to nu-aeon magick. Her eyes petrify and stop time. In that void-minded instant, awareness can

214 A Tangle of Serpents

travel into her eyes, and through this head of coiling serpents into realms beyond reasonable comprehension. In Thelemic terms, Medusa seems to function for Maat as Babalon functions for Nuit. She is a gate, a doorway to primal forms of consciousness, to strange aeons and timeless mysteries. Her mask reflects the mask of the seer, who is transformed in a coiling spiral dance of evolution. Medusa, like so many of the elder deities, had a fearful reputation in classical literature. She has been called a 'force of evil' by priests who could not comprehend her mysteries, and found their own fear and desire reflected in her eyes.

Closely related to Medusa are the serpent women who appear in German folk-lore under the name 'Melusine'. One version of the tale has Melusine as a beautiful lady. A nobleman marries her on the condition that she has one day of the week all to herself. During that day, she retires to a secret room in the castle where she assumes a serpent-shape and slips into a water tank. In another legend, Melusine is a lady who haunts the swamps and forests at night. Lurking in the shadows, she eagerly awaits the man who dares to free her. This is no easy task, as he has to come to her on three nights and kiss her. The first night is pleasant, as Melusine appears ladylike and very sexy. The second night is not quite as easy, as only her top half looks feminine, the lower parts of her body having become serpentine coils. This upsets many daring males, but a few manage to kiss her by avoiding to look down. In the third night, her bottom half is still serpentine. Her top half, however, has turned into a great toad with a huge mouth, a lengthy tongue and the oldest eyes in the world. These eyes have seen a lot of men run screaming.

Melusine, like Medusa, had a lot of bad publicity over the centuries. It comes as no surprise that such deities, who have been despised for ages, respond very eagerly when they are invoked with honest sympathy. If you love them, they may well come to love you, and mind you, being loved by a draconian deity can have a drastic, if not purgative effect on what you consider your personality. I recall quite a few intense crisis scenes that happened after I found contact with Medusa who, like many ancient deities, has a peculiar sense of humour when it comes to

transformation and the refinement of her priesthood. Sometimes it is useful to assume an 'evolutionary' point of view and to remember that momentary unpleasantness can be quite healthy for certain long-term developments. Also, there is the question of humour. In crisis scenes, there is a definite relation between how seriously you take yourself and how much it hurts. To produce a really painful crisis, certain mental attitudes are required, which are all tied up with ego. To make it hurt you have to take yourself very seriously. You have to believe that your work is really important, and you'll require a dose of fear, that you could 'fail' at the job. To make it perfectly awful, top this with a sense of urgency and pretend that you need everything changed now. This recipe makes very painful and messy crisis scenes. Now the funny thing is that the pain isn't really required. A magical crisis, i.e. one that transforms you intensely, doesn't have to be painful at all. If a crisis hurts much, this doesn't guarantee that you're really transforming. It simply indicates that you are stuck in some way, and not transforming as elegantly as you could. An ego that offers little resistance to change is not inclined to feel hurt. An ego that embraces change, and laughs about itself may find so many exciting things happen that it won't even notice what others perceive as pain. Remember that between the 'true self' and the 'ego' lies the abyss, whose gate and guardian, Joke Sothoth, is the creator of names and the greatest jester in the multiverse.

Think of the famous Indian goddess Kali whose name means 'black' but might also be related to *kala* - time. She is usually shown dancing enthusiastically on copulating couples or corpses. Kali, like her Nordic counterpart Hel, is said to be of awful appearance. Her colour is the black of the void. Coiling serpents adorn her arms, legs and throat; they wind about her head and incite her to lust and madness. Her home is the cremation ground and desolate places deep in the forest where her rites are celebrated with great secrecy and where she dances and laughs like a fiend, exhibiting blood-red eyes and terrifying fangs. It is typical for the goddess to adorn herself with a 'garland of corpses', to dance on skulls and to bathe in rivers of wine and blood, to name just a few symbols which veil the essence of the deity behind a mask of terror.

216 A Tangle of Serpents

Hindu mythology claims that Kali was born during a battle between the gods and a race of elder demons. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? On the battlefield, the face of the goddess Durga became black with rage, and out of her emerged Kali as a terrifying hag who laughs with glee as she dismembers demons. In one episode, she set out to fight the demon Raktabija ('Blood-seed'), who had the power that his force increased and that he could duplicate himself whenever his blood fell to the ground. The gods, with their ordinary weapons, were helpless against Raktabija, who doubled and tripled each time he was wounded. Kali, however, found the solution. After wounding him badly, she took hold of the wound and sucked the demon dry. Then she gobbled up all the replicas, eating them in one bite, until she stood all alone on the battlefield. This was the end of the demon. It was also the beginning of Kali's career as a major deity (see Kinsley, 1986, and Mookerjee, 1988). Brimming full with the blood of the ancient one she became raving mad and would have destroyed the universe had not the gods made a drum out of the demon's corpse and incited her to dance.

Her ruby-studded brow is calm,
Her eyes shine like some sleepy flood;
Her breast is oliban and balm;
Her tongue lolls out, a-dripping blood;
She swings my body to and fro;
She breaks me on the wheel of woe!
To her eternal rapture seems
Mere nature, underneath the crown
Of dusky emeralds there streams
A river of bliss to sluice me down
With blood and tears, to drown my thought,
And bring my being into naught.

Thus wrote Kali's devotee Mahatma Paramahansa Shivaji (Aleister Crowley) who was among the first Western occultists to comprehend that the violent and abhorred mask of Kali veils a secret blessing: the joy of ego-death and self-realisation.

The Indian poet Ramprasad celebrated Kali with the lines:

When the head is not, headache cannot remain.
 As when fire consumes a bale of cotton,
 So all goes, in Kali's name.

And the *Hymn to Kali* gives explicit instructions for the worship:

He, O Mahakali, who in the cremation-ground, naked and with dishevelled hair, intently meditates upon thee and recites thy mantra, and with each recitation makes offering to thee of a thousand akanda flowers with seed, becomes without any effort a lord of the earth.

My tantrik informant tells me that akanda flowers are stemless, a clear metaphor. Such flowers are used to 'capture' a mantra before it is dropped over an image of Kali. The same formula may be applied to the worship of Helja, and to some other 'terrifying' deities who are only terrifying as long as there is an ego to fear them. Medusa, Hel, Lilith - they were all banished from regular religion due to their 'terrifying' nature. Priests cursed them, churches fought them and popular belief turned them into creatures of evil. Kali, somehow, escaped this fate. Though she is not exactly the most popular deity in India, there are places and castes which still make a point of honouring her. This makes Kali, brimming full with the blood of the slain demon, one of the very few representatives of the ancient ones whose cult wasn't destroyed or repressed - and there aren't many of them around.

Many mythologies see serpents as images of energy, of the life force (think of the Kundalini - metaphor for instance). Such serpents move in the body, they may also be found in the energy currents that flow through the earth. Dragons, as symbols of the life force in the land, found their human counterparts in divine kings. To the early Celtic and German tribes, a king was not so much a ruler as a 'sacred figure'. Often, a king was chosen by the nobles and priests. Such a king would have few political but many religious functions. Apart from ordering other people around, these kings were obliged to represent the vitality of their country, which burdened them with countless taboos and

218 A Tangle of Serpents

traditions, and a tight schedule of daily rituals. A 'dragon' could be the title of a king, and indeed you can find the term used by Myrddin in the *Black Book of Carmarthen*, where he mentions 'dragon kings' and states 'the Welsh will win. Glorious shall their dragon be.' Dragons are intimately connected with the legend of Myrddin, or 'Merlin'.

Let us now consider the tale of Merlin and the dragons. In Robert de Boron's (c. 1180) version we find King Vortigern, a Celtic king who came to power by slaying the lawful ruler, Konstanz. Vortigern made himself monarch of Britain, while the sons of Konstanz hastily fled to Brittany. Vortigern was not a popular ruler, and had all reason to fear that the sons of the former ruler might return in force. In a moment of brilliance he decided to invite a lot of Saxon warriors, who were quite eager to come and help the king, while occupying as much land as they could. Soon enough, Vortigern was forced to marry a Saxon queen, which did not make his life an easier one, and he began to dream. He dreamed of a tower, a strong and tall tower. He dreamed of living in this tower, far above the world, and secure at last. The finest masons of Britain came to Vortigern's court. They were given all they needed and much more to build a refuge for their terrified king. So the masons built, and built again, and each time the tower collapsed and fell to pieces.

To simplify the story somewhat, I'll leave out the prophecy of the sages, and the search for the child without a father. Suffice it to say that young Merlin, whose father has been a real devil, was brought to court where he explained everything. Beneath the tower, he said, was water, and in its depths, beneath two stones, two dragons were sleeping. One was white, the other red, and whenever the building above them became too heavy, they twisted their scaly bodies and churned the waters until the tower came tumbling down again. Immediately, Vortigern had his workers dig up the ground and indeed they found the great dark water beneath the earth. Merlin advised them how to drain the lake, and as soon as the water level fell, big rocks appeared. Then the dragons awoke, and smelled each other. Screaming terribly they reared up and fought each other tooth and claw. The red dragon was the bigger one,

and it wounded the white dragon sorely, but the white dragon was more vicious, and in the end it killed the red one. Later, Merlin told King Vortigern that there was a hidden prophecy in the vision. The red dragon symbolised King Vortigern with his Celtic troops and Saxon mercenaries, while the white dragon stood for the sons of Konstanz who soon returned from their exile in Brittany to slay Vortigern.

A very similar account of this tale was related by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *History of the Kings of Britain*, and Nennius in his *History of the British* also gives it, saying he had it from an earlier work *The Book of the Blessed Germanus*. Here the waters of the deep contained two big vats, which held folded tents. Inside the tents, and wrapped in the cloth, the red and white serpent were sleeping.

In Geoffrey's version, the colours of the dragons are the other way around. Here, the red dragon symbolised the people of Britain while the white stood for the Saxons. Neither dragon symbolised Vortigern or the sons of Constantine, and the explanation given by Merlin is only part of a long and confused outburst of prophesy. Geoffrey obtained his colour-symbolism from the *Book of the Blessed Germanus*. Now the red dragon does have national significance today, as it is the national beast of Wales. Whether the white dragon ever symbolised the Saxons to themselves is something I find rather doubtful. It is possible that the British acquired the dragon-totem from the standards used by some Roman legions. The British nobility had been strongly influenced by Roman rule, spoke Latin and had accepted an early form of Christianity. Although this is just speculation, I would like to add that red and white are two of the oldest and most sacred colours of the draconian tradition, where they symbolised the white fluids of sperm and the red secrets of menstruation.

The story of the dragons is a popular one. One highly interesting version comes from the *Mabinogi*, in the tale of the kings Lludd and Llevelys. This brief story describes three plagues. One of these plagues was a horrible scream that was heard every may-eve over every hearth of the island, and it caused warriors to quake with fear, made women miscarry, people lose their wits, and the trees, soil and water became

220 A Tangle of Serpents

barren and devoid of life. This was a great problem for King Lludd, but luckily his brother, King Llevelys knows where the scream originated, and gives the following advice: the scream came from a dragon.

A dragon of another race, a foreign one, is fighting with it and struggling to overcome it, and therefore your dragon screams horribly. This is how you can see for yourself:

When you arrive home measure the length and breadth of the island, and where you find the exact centre have a pit dug*, in this pit place a vat full of the best mead that can be made, with a silk sheet over the vat, and guard all this yourself. You will see the dragons fighting in the shape of monstrous animals until they finally rise into the air as dragons, and when they have wearied of their horrid and frightening combat they will sink onto the sheet in the form of two little pigs; they will drag the sheet to the bottom of the vat, and there they will drink the mead and fall asleep. When that happens you must wrap the sheet around them and lock them in a stone chest, and bury them in the earth within the strongest place you know of in this island. As long as they are within that strong place, no plague will come to Britain. *Mabinogion*, Trans. Gantz

You will notice that this story, unlike the preceding tale, describes how dragons may be invoked and put to good uses. The *Mabinogi* does not give the colours of the dragons.

To complete this study of dragons and serpents in pagan Europe, I would like to mention some Celtic myths and symbolism. The serpent, especially that fantastic variety with a ram's head, is one of the oldest Celtic cult animals. According to Anne Ross, ram-headed serpents appear in proto-Celtic contexts and in the early phases of the so-called Hallstatt culture on the continent. A well known specimen can be seen in the hands of the horned god on the Gundestrup cauldron, which may or may not be of Celtic origin. The ram-headed serpent appears on numerous altars in Celtic Europe and was attributed to several deities. Horned deities often appear together with them. In a fit of over-

* *This happened to be in Oxford, right under P. O. Box 250!*

simplification, modern Wicca tends to label all horned deities as 'Cernunnos', who is supposed to be a god of wild wood, hunting and the mysteries of beast-form shamanism. The name '(C)ernunnos', however, occurs only on one altar in Gaul, and is otherwise unknown. There are several distinct types of horned gods in the Celtic world. Some of them show three heads, some are well known warrior deities, and others are goddesses. On the other hand the ⁴ lord of the beasts', as he appears in the romance Owain (see the



Horned serpent/dragon. Silver coin attributed to the Celtic Boier tribe.

Mabinogi) is a black giant who has only one eye and one foot (closing one eye and standing on one foot is a posture of the magicians in Welsh folk-lore), and the only horns in evidence are those of a stag which he beats with an iron spear (like a drum?) to call all the beasts of the forest. Anne Ross mentions several horned deities whose icons exhibit serpents, such as a nameless bull-horned god, holding a serpent and a purse (note that in north European mythology, snakes and dragons often guard hoards or treasures), or the antlered god whose legs are horned serpents. Several island-Celtic warrior deities are shown with serpents, and the same goes for several goddesses, such as Verbeia, who grasps serpents, and is often associated with aquatic cults. Borvo, god of healing and springs also shows snakes in his symbolism, and the highly popular god Vitiris is likewise symbolised by a boar and a serpent. Sadly, next to nothing is known about the nature or character of these deities. Some serpents are linked with the element water and seem to have been worshipped at sacred springs, wells, pools or rivers. A

222 A Tangle of Serpents

distorted version of this appears in Gerald of Wales *Journey through Wales* (II, 2). Gerald describes a man who dreamed three times he would find a golden torque if he would put a hand into a slot above a sacred well. Instead, he found a viper who bit and killed him. In a similar vein he recounts the episode of a sick young man who was assaulted by an army of toads, real or imaginary. His friends sought to help and put him in a bag, which they tied to the top of a tall tree. This did not stop the toads, who climbed the tree and ate their victim up till only bones remained - which is reminiscent of certain shamanic traditions.

Serpents are often associated with water, in which case they exhibit fish-tails and spend their time flooding the countryside. Other serpents of island Celtic mythology show horns, crests, or wings, and some of them breathe fire as well. A common image is the male Medusa head, which appears near numerous holy wells. These heads have complicated tangles of hair and beard, some of them show serpents woven into the mane. Popular during the Roman occupation, such heads could hide native cults under an acceptable symbolism. In some periods, serpents seem to have received veneration. In one Irish legend, *The Cattle Raid of Froech*, the hero Conall Cernach assaults a fortress guarded by a serpent. As he attacks, the serpent hurls itself at him and, instead of biting, hides under his belt. The fortress is destroyed and its treasures are taken. After the battle, Conall lets the serpent out of his belt, and it is noted that neither has done harm to the other. Welsh history mentions King Ceneu Menrud, a grandson of Urien, who wore an adder (Neidyr) around his neck for a year. Such practices are not uncommon for serpent-priests all over the world, but coming from a nominally 'Christian' king they do seem surprising.

A well known proverb claims that St. Patrick banished all serpents from Ireland. Irish mythology, however, indicates that the serpents were destroyed much earlier by the famous hero Finn or Fionn, who spent much of his time travelling the country to exterminate any monster that came his way. St. Samson of Dol is likewise known to have battled serpents, and St. Columban, who inflicted Christianity on Scotland, is the first tourist in recorded history who met Nessie while

crossing Loch Ness. 'Watch your step, mate!' the saintly man snarled, and the serpent duly sank into the deep, from where (who knows?) St. Aleister Crowley resurrected it by working wild magick in Boleskine.

This brings us to another valuable source of draconian mythology: the poems attributed to the Welsh bard Taliesin. Taliesin, which means 'bright, or radiant brow' is a highly enigmatic figure. When we examine the poems of the *Book of Taliesin* it soon becomes obvious that there were at least two authors who wrote under the name. One was a historical bard of the 6th century who achieved fame by singing eulogies for Urien, Owain, Gwallag, Cynan Garwyn and other lords and heroes of northern Wales and Britain. These songs are easy to recognise in that they praise lords for their generous and war-loving ways. Violence against enemies was highly praised and often the bard concluded the chant by stating that he is not in his element if he does not praise Urien (who paid for the performance).

The songs of the other Taliesin are a different matter. These medieval songs speak of magic and transformation, of prophecy, shape-changing and the mysteries of island-Celtic mythology. Their author, or authors, wrote under the name 'Taliesin' to emphasise kinship with a being of super-human qualities and insight. Though the mythical Taliesin appeared in the shape of a human being, it is easy to recognise that this bard knew and revealed knowledge that surpasses human comprehension. Many of these songs contain questions and riddles which taunt the reader to go beyond the limits of conscious comprehension. While some of the material of these songs may arguable come from the sixth century, most of them were formed at a later time. They are the product of the bardic revival, the Gogynfeirdd movement, which flowered from 1080-1350 and produced not only the *Mabinogi* but also the songs attributed to the 'mystical' Taliesin. (See R Hutton 1991). I shall deal with the Taliesin myth in another chapter, as it contains keys to trance-states and certain forms of inner alchemy. In this chapter, with its emphasis on draconian lore, I would like to offer some gems from Taliesin's word-hoard. To understand them properly I would ask you to remember that their author claims to be much more than is humanly

224 A Tangle of Serpents

possible. The mythical Taliesin claims, quite simply, that he has been around from before the beginning of the world, 'an instructor to the universe', and shall continue to its end. This Taliesin has witnessed all key events of history, be they past or future, and has lived in a myriad of shapes and forms. Consequently, his songs are a rich source of eldritch lore, which has survived in cryptic but definite form, in spite of the censorship that Christian monks and modern translators have tried to inflict on it.

For a start, consider these lines. They begin with hints concerning the great-boar chase which you can find in the tale of *Culhwch and Olwen*. (*Mabinogi*)

(I know) of the slaying of the boar,
Its appearing, its disappearing,
Its knowledge of languages.
(I know) the light whose name is splendour
And the number of the ruling lights,
That scatter rays of fire
High above the deep.
I have been a spotted snake upon a hill,
I have been a viper in a lake;
I have been an evil star formerly
I have been a weight in a mill (?)
My cassock is red all over.'

(Translated by Nash)

Note how these few lucid words join the boar chase, stellar wisdom and serpent-transformations. If the 'weight in the mill' refers to the old form of the stone queen, the allusion may well be sexual. Taliesin frequently emphasised his kinship to the stars:

I know the star knowledge
Of stars before the earth (was made),
Whence I was born
How many worlds there are.

(Nash)

In Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the *Hanes Taliesin*, the

bard introduces himself:

Primary chief bard am I to Elphin,
 And my original country is the
 Region of the summer stars;
 Idno and Heinin called me Merddin,
 At length every king will call me Taliesin.

Stellar knowledge is frequently mentioned in *The Book of Taliesin*, as are the seven planets of antiquity, but if the bard knew about the near-eastern system of astrology he did not bother to say so. For Taliesin, the knowledge of the stars is aligned with a curious sense of nostalgia, with the urge to return to the land of origin. It is a common theme of the draconian mythos that 'the ancient ones' came to earth from the stars, and the same might be said of Taliesin, and indeed of humanity itself. Taliesin's cryptic consciousness, which transcends time and realises all of the world 'as now' comes close to Maatian 'vortex' trances, and to the sentience of ancient ones and giants, who likewise exist 'dead but dreaming', in timeless realms outside of human consciousness. There are curious glimpses at these ancient entities scattered through the songs of Taliesin.

In one mysterious fragment of the *Katgoddeu* the bard describes a battle fought in the earliest ages. Two monsters are described in an enigmatic style which has led to dozens of scholarly interpretations.

I have fought, though small,
 In the battle of Goddeu Brig,
 Before the ruler of Britain,
 Abounding in fleets.
 Indifferent bards pretend,
 They pretend a monstrous beast,
 With a hundred heads,
 And a grievous combat
 At the root of the tongue.
 And another light there is
 At the back of the head,
 A toad having on his thighs

226 A Tangle of Serpents

A hundred claws,
A spotted crested snake,
For punishing in their flesh
A hundred souls on account of their sins.
(Nash)

The many-headed monster, the toad and the snake are all popular totems of the draconian tradition, while the mouth, the tongue and the back of the head are human power-zones vital to certain forms of inner alchemy.

Where it comes to monsters and the like, Taliesin has much more to offer. On one of his songs, he challenges the well-fed bards of Maelgwn's court to guess at the nature of such a beast:

... There is a noxious creature,
From the rampart of Satanas,
Which has overcome all
Between the deep and the shallow;
Equally wide are his jaws
As the mountains of the Alps;
Him death will not subdue,
Nor hand or blades;
There is the load of nine-hundred wagons
In the hair of his two paws;
There is in his head an eye
Green as the limpid sheet of icicle;
Three springs arise
In the nape of his neck...

(trans. Lady Guest)

It is the nature of these springs which gives the answer. The first spring, we learn, generates brine from the midst of the ocean. The second falls on us ('without injury') in the shape of rain, while the third appears

through the mountain's veins,
like a flinty banquet.

In Celtic lore, springs and fountains are generally blessed places of

wealth, fertility and abundance. The three springs may be taken for salt, and the wealth of the ocean, for rain, nourishing the land, and for the secret wealth in the mountains, the stones, minerals and metals resting in the ground. As the bards remain dumbstruck, Taliesin accuses them that they cannot celebrate the kingdom of the Britons. Is the monstrous beast of the poem a metaphor for 'the honey Isle' Britain, or for the known world of his age? It reminds me of the Scottish tale of Master Assipattle (*Scottish Fairy Tales* Sir G.D. Bart, London 1892) who sailed into the mouth of a dragon, where he built a big fire that slew the monster. In its dying cramps, the dragon's tail split Denmark from Scandinavia, and its teeth, falling all over the place, became the Orkneys, the Shetlands and the Faroe Islands. The dragon itself rolled up and became Iceland - and as anyone can see, its fire is still burning.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to quote a few lines from a Taliesin poem that details the actual invocation of a dragon.

A bright festivity
 About the two lakes.
 The lake on my side.
 The side about the Caer [fortress],
 The Caer in urgency
 Has been described.
 A comely flight from it;
 And the legion of the band
 Augmented stones.
 The dragon will flow around,
 Above the places,
 Vessels of liquor.
 Liquor in golden horns,
 Golden horns in hand.
 Hand on the knife,
 The knife in the rallying point...

(trans. Skene)



17 Gods and Giants

'My gods have grown with me hence I never outgrow them;' wrote Austin Osman Spare, and similar observations can be made about cultures. Ancient northern Europe saw many different climes through the ages, and many different modes of living. Religious belief and ritual changed to suit a changing way of life. Gods change to suit their worshippers, just as people change to suit their gods. I remember how surprised I was when an ethnology professor told me that the great Egyptian god Osiris began his career as a humble vegetation deity (in charge of grains and harvest) while the 'great mother' Isis began hers as a local deity of springs and streams in one of the many provinces of Egypt. Most gods start small and humble. At first, they can be happy when they have a dozen worshippers to give enthusiasm to the cult, and when such a small god does good work, the cult will grow. To get really big, a god has to become popular. Some gods manage to keep themselves known and worshipped in a small province for a century or two with very little happening, until someone from that province gets rich and mighty, and installs that deity in a big temple. Maybe someone will usurp a throne, and make his own deity the deity of the state. With each phase of its development, the deity will transform to suit the new conditions. The original Isis was concerned with one or two streams. To grow into a 'great mother goddess' she had to be in charge of all streams, all rainfall (the tears of Isis), the great primal sea and all living things besides. It seems probable that before Isis became popular there were other deities in charge of these phenomena.

230 Gods and Giants

Thus, gods have much to do with politics. Sometimes a god transforms so completely that the original belief is forgotten. It may happen that a cult becomes corrupt, in which case the god may decide to ignore her/his followers, and to await another age for a new chance. You may be familiar with these phenomena from *Helrunar* where I have repeatedly mentioned the changing career of Wodan/Odin. In Eddic and Nordic literature, Odin appears mainly as the 'Father of the Gods', Lord of Asgard, a serene and dignified regent gathering troops of slain heroes for the final battle at the end of time. This representation is congruent with the belief structures of Viking society, which had Odin as a god of war and heroism, who would only admit those heroes to Valhall who had died fighting bravely on the battlefield. This myth was quite useful to incite warriors to battle madness, and should perhaps be considered a motivation strategy. Most Viking warriors were afraid of disease or old age, and feared the shameful 'straw death', i.e. to die in bed. Thus, old Vikings used to seek a glorious death in combat, and one king is mentioned in the sagas who 'had himself marked by the spear and offered to Odin' when he realised that he would die in bed. Now the Eddic theories on heroic death are not very consistent; there seem to be exceptions to the rule, such as the slain Balder, who does not go to Valhall but finds himself in Hel's foggy halls. In mainland Europe, where the cult of Odin originated, the deity remained in a more primal form. German mythology knows Odin under a variety of names, such as Wodan, Wode, Woide, Wods or Wuotes. All of these are known to lead the 'wild hunt' across the storm-swept skies. Rage is their energy, and lust, and mad obsession, inspired frenzy and ecstatic song. Like the 'young Odin' of the *Edda*, the Wodan spirit is a god of shamanism, a traveller in the twilight, searching for visions. As an elemental force, Wodan rides the stormwinds. As an ancestral shaman, Wodan is in league with the spirits of the otherworlds, be they giant, human or otherwise. These spirits form the wild hunt. In these legends, there is no trace of elitism. Dead people go into the mountains, from where they emerge for the wild hunt or for rebirth, and heroism, though desirable, is not required for admittance. As far as I know, in middle Europe, only

one tribe, the Herulians, cultivated the belief that a heroic death was needed to gain favour in the eyes of Odin. When we search still further, we may encounter Wodan in an even older form. The *Rig Veda* contains a hymn to Vata, god of the gale:

1. O the power and glory of the chariot of the gale! It breaks things into pieces as it passes by, making a sound like thunder. Touching the sky it moves, it makes red streaks; passing along the earth it scatters the dust.

2. The tempests race together, after the gale; they come to him like women to a rendezvous. Yoked with them to a single chariot, the god who is the king of this whole universe passes by.

3. Moving along his path in the middle realm of space, he does not rest even for a single day. Friend of the waters, first-born keeper of the law, where was he born? What was he created from?

4. Breath of the gods, embryo of the universe, this god wanders wherever he pleases. His sounds are heard but his form is not seen. Let us worship the gale with oblation.

(Trans. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty.)

It seems likely that the Indo-Europeans brought Vata to India when they conquered the country c. 2000 BC. By the time the *Rig Veda* was compiled (1200-900 BC), Vata had already become a minor god whose legends and symbols were half-forgotten or attributed to the more popular deities Varuna and Indra. The draconian elements in the Wodan cults can be found in its earliest expressions. Note how Wodan/Odin shape-changes, explores the twilight, evokes spirits and processes information. A close analogy can be found in the Yog Sothoth mythos of H.P. Lovecraft. 'Yog Sothoth', the guardian of the abyss, can be interpreted in terms of Egyptian symbolism, as Kenneth Grant has demonstrated, as the 'Aeon of Seth-Thoth'. In Scandinavian lore, there are among the numerous names of Odin the titles 'Yggr' ('The Terrible') and 'Sadr' ('Truthful'). Combined as 'Ygg-Sadr' we encounter 'The Terrible Truth'.

In Odin's blood-brother Loki there are similar traces of the elder



DEVOURING A HEART
IN THE DEPTH OF THE WOODS
FLESH BURNED TO ASHES
AND HARD AS A STONE

lore. It may be worth considering that the closest parallel to Wodan in the Celtic world is the spear wielding, raven-accompanied god Lugh. If Loki is related to Lugh (their names come from the same root) this would explain the 'blood brother' status of Loki. Where the Celtic Lugh appears as a radiant, shining warrior, skilled and cunning in every craft, his Germanic counterpart Loki is fiery, cunning and a craftsman of deceit. A competent shape changer like Odin, Loki experiences more transformations than the other gods. Loki is ambiguous, functioning as a trickster, a criminal and a clown, who satirises the gods and himself. Now Loki, though he does 'wrong' by Viking morals, is not a 'force of evil'. A healthy Valhalla needs someone like Loki, who supplies an 'outside' point of view and a wild sense of humour, to keep the gods from going stagnant. It is an interesting fact that Loki, for all his shady reputation, was occasionally asked for help. In his excellent study of Loki, Georges Dumézil gives a Greenlandish folktale which relates how Loki helps a peasant to fight a giant. Loki is successful where Odin and Honir failed miserably. It is an interesting detail that the tale was forbidden in Greenland. Loki helps, but not in a reliable fashion, nor is he much concerned with ordinary ethics. This brings him close to the African god Exu and to the Voodoo god Ghede, both of whom are well known as dangerous tricksters who tend to joke and upset rituals. Like Loki they are known for their great lusts and loose morals. 'Exu is good' a Brazilian percussionist told me once. 'He acts fast and doesn't think so much'. Indeed these deities get things done.

Folk belief in Scandinavia blames Loki for things which don't work. Bad wool is blamed on Loki. If you have trouble with string, be sure that Loki is in it, and if your clothes show a hole - well, Loki took the fabric to repair his own. In Sweden, spiders are called *locke*, *lock*, and the spider's web *lockanat* or *lockasnara*, which may well be related to the god. In the *Edda*, Loki invents the net. Spiders are among the most important draconian totem beasts. Consider that spiders weave webs out of their own secretions, which they fashion to cross the void of space. Consider that spider silk consists largely of proteins, the spider will eat up the old silk while spinning new structures, so that the web

234 Gods and Giants

can be considered part of the spider's body. In the weeks after Chernobyl, the forest spiders refused to eat their webs but built new ones. Consider that spider webs create a living space for the spider, and order the world, much like magicians learn their Qabalah, and weave their webs of symbols and beliefs to make sense and meaning of the world. For those who wish to learn how reality is woven, I would heartily recommend assuming a spider form and learning about it from direct experience. Mind you, there are lots of ways in which spiders create and structure reality. To weave a big web and wait for flies is only one approach. Consider also the tactics and methods of wolf spiders, crab spiders, jumping spiders, water spiders, nocturnal hunters, hole and tube dwellers, as well as the odd ones, such as spider-eating spiders, thief-spiders, spitting spiders, or the social spiders who like to share webs, food and baby-sitting duties. Each of these spiders has characteristic methods to create a reality of its choice.

In Iceland, the term 'lokabrenna' means both the heat of the dog-days, and its star, Sirius. 'Loki's torch' would be one translation - here we have Loki in his destructive aspect, when he arises as the wolf, as the flame, as the enemy of the gods in the final battle. In many mythologies, Sirius is said to be the place where certain extra-terrestrials came from. The Dogon from Upper Volta believe in a heavenly crocodile, for instance, that brought human life from Sirius to earth. In Egypt, the rising of Sirius (or 'Sothis', i.e. Seth-Isis) signified that soon the Nile would flood the country, bringing death, destruction, and after the deluge, renewed fertility of the soil. These topics are well documented in R. Temple *The Sirius Mystery* 1976, and in the works of Kenneth Grant. While the eddic Loki is already a dubious figure, there exists in the prose *Edda*, and to a certain extent in *Saxo Grammaticus*, an even older version of the deity: The lord of the giants, known as Utgardloki ('out-land-Loki'). It is a well known tale how the gods Thor and Loki, together with their human servants, came to Utgardloki's halls, where they were deceived and cheated by the sorceries of their hosts. Thor himself tried to prove the strength of the gods, and failed at such tasks as 'lifting the cat' and 'wrestling with an

old lady'. Little did he know that the cat was, in truth, the midgard serpent, which cannot be lifted as it encloses the earth, and that the old lady, who threw him so easily, bore the name 'age'. Few have wondered who the ruler of the giants may be, that he has the world serpent and age itself living in his frosty halls. At his court, Loki challenged the giant 'Logi' to an eating contest. They both started stuffing themselves with meat, from different sides of a trough. When they met in the middle, Loki had eaten all the meat on his side, but Logi had devoured the bones, and the trough as well. Here Loki, meaning 'light, flame' had eaten against Logi, which means the wild fire, and lost. In Saxo's account, which is not sympathetic with pagan ideas, the hero Thorkil sets out to learn what happens after death. After a long voyage through a land of total darkness he comes to a deep cave. Here, Thorkil and his friends find the giant 'Ugarthilocus', who lies chained and bound. His hair, Saxo wrote, was sharp like horn or swordblades and smelled horribly. Just for fun, Thorkil's men pull one out. The giant screams and a host of trolls and venomous serpents appears, who kill all the humans except for Thorkil, who is saved by Christ. In the *Edda*, it is Loki who got bound by the gods. This is closely related to the medieval idea of the devil 'Lukifer', who was considered safely chained in hell.

The 'ancient ones', the primal proto-deities of the Dawn Ages, appear in the *Edda*, as in many other mythologies, in the form of 'giants'. Folklore is full of giants, and there are so many types of them that it can be hard to recognise the original phenomena. In most fairy tales, giants tend to be big, strong and somewhat stupid. In older legends, giants are often representatives of great natural forces. Thus we can find giants who live in certain mountains, or giants who make awful weather. Golther's excellent *Handbook of German Mythology* claims that Old Norse *Jotunn*, Lap. *Jetanas* and Anglo Saxon *Eoten*, as names of a giant tribe, come from Old Germanic: **etanaz-*, 'to eat a lot', while Old Norse *Thurs*. Finn. *Tursas*, Anglo Saxon *Thyrs*, Old High German *Turso* come from *Thuras*, Sanskrit *Turas*, meaning 'strong, mighty, powerful'. The Eddic *Hrimthursir* are the frost-giants, keepers of the wisdom of the Ice Ages. Giants come in many forms and

236 Gods and Giants

varieties. Some of them are related to natural phenomena, and live in mountains, streams, stormgales, or the oceans. Consider the following giant names (all translations Golther):

'Hundviss' = to know a lot;	'Liota' = disgusting;
'Fjolkunnigr' = much learned;	'Fornjot' = oldest of giants;
'Framvisar' = to know the future;	'Hraswelg' = to indulge in car-
'Thruthmothe ^r gr' = strong in deeds;	rion;
'Amattegr' = over-mighty;	'Skessa', 'Flagd' = loose women;
'Aegir' = watery;	'Kallrani' = cold snout;
'Gymir' = keeper, custodian;	'Lodinfingra' = shaggy fingers;
'Hymir' = dark, twilighty;	'Hardhaus' = tough skull;
'Mimir' = to sense, to think;	'Skrymir' = great speaker;
'Thrym' and 'Hrugnir' = noisy,	'Mokkurkalfi' = fog-shanks,
loud.	'Ymir' possibly from
'Vindr' = windy, blowing;	'Ymya' = rushing, roaring; mod-
'Vindsvalr' = father of the winter;	ern translators suggest = androgy-
'Kari' = wind;	nous;
'Widolf' = forest dweller;	'Orgelmir' = mighty roar;
'Jarnvithja' = she who dwells in	'Norwi', 'Narfi' = narrow, dark;
the iron forest;	'Suttung' = heavy with drink;
'Eldr' = fire;	'Vafthruthner' = strong in riddles;
'Hyrrokin' = fire vortex or fire	'Swasud' = mild;
smoke;	'Windswal' = windcold;
'Runse' = the flowing one;	'Vetr' = winter;
'Leirwor' = the muddy one;	'Sumar' = summer';
'Hyndla' = dog- or wolflike;	'Wasad' = bearer of woe;
'Trana' = crane.	'Nott' = night;
'Kraka' = the crow;	'Dagr' = day;
'Surt' = darkness;	'Herkir' = fire;
'Swarthofdi' = blackhead;	'Fenja' = ocean;
'Syrpa' = dirty;	'Nal' = needle (?);
'Tumbo' = dumb;	'Logi' = wildfire;
'Lodin' = shaggy;	'Jokul' = glacier;

'Snaer' = snow;	'Hastigi' = high steps;
'Fonn' = snow heap;	'Henginkjapt' = hangingjaw;
'Drifa' = snow drift;	'Muli' = great mouth;
'Frosti' = frost;	'Skinnefja' = fur-nose;
'MjolP' = gleaming snow;	'Hornnefja' = horn-nose;
'Stumi' = silent;	'Jarnnef' = iron-nose;
'Hardgreip' = hard grip;	

Edda translator Karl Simrock gave the following translations of giant names:

'Ymir' - roar;	'Hymir' = greedy;
'Jord' - earth;	'Modgudr' = soulbattle;
'Managarm' = moon dog;	'Thok' = thanks;
'Windswalr' = cool winds;	'Gunnlod' - inviting to battle;
'Angurboda' = messenger of fear;	'Hrugnir' = to echo;
'Gerda' = the protected one, earth?;	'Mockurkalfi' = weak shanks;
'Beli' = screaming, barker;	'Gullweig' = gold force, goldlust;
'Swadilfari' - driver of cold;	'Heid' = (possibly) greed, envy.

It all began with the great gaping void. *Voluspa* and prose *Edda* agree on this point, and state that the southern rim of the void was hot and bright, while the northern rim was dark and frozen. Within the void, the cold mists of Niflheim and the bright fire sparks of Muspelheim met and mingled. Out of fire and fog, an elixir came dripping, and conglomerated into a human image. This was Ymir, oldest of the giants.

'As he slept, he began to sweat. Then under his left arm grew a man and a woman, and his one foot conceived a son with the other. And from these comes the race of the Hrimthursir (frost giants)' said Odin, in the mask of King Mar in the prose *Edda* (Gylf. 5). Is he a god, then? asks King Gylfi. Odin answers: 'We certainly do not consider him a god; he was evil, like all of his kind...' Our story continues. A cow appeared, called Audhumla, and four streams of milk ran from her udder. Ymir



lived on the milk, and the cow lived on the salt she found in the ice at the northern rim of the void. This cow may well be a relation of the ancient Vedic goddess Aditi who likes to appear as a heavenly cow, deity of the heavy rain clouds. In the Uruz rune (see *Helrunar*) the concepts of the primal wild cattle, and the rainshower are connected. Audhumla licked the ice blocks and after a day, hair appeared. After another, a man's head, and after a third an entire man, who was called Buri. We know little about this figure. Buri is certainly not one of Ymir's children, but he isn't human either. Who or what did the cow find in the ice? The *Edda* continues that Buri had a son, called Bor, so presumably, Buri found a wife among the giants. Bor did likewise, and married Bestla, daughter of the giant Bolthorn (Evil Thorn). They had three sons, called Odin, Wili and Weh. If you have followed this genealogy closely, you will notice that Odin's mother Bestla was a giant lady, while his father Bor was a half-giant, the other half having crawled out of the glacier. Odin's genetic makeup is three-quarters giant genes, which throws a peculiar light on his statement that Ymir was evil, like all of his kind. The story continues with the slaying of great Ymir, for which no reason is given. Odin and his brothers killed Ymir, and hurled the corpse into the gaping void. Out of his blood they made the rivers, streams and oceans, out of his flesh the living earth, out of his bones the hills and mountains, and from his brains they made the clouds and set them sailing round the earth. Ymir's teeth became rock, his hair was turned to forests, dark and silent, and the crown of his skull was lifted high to form the brilliance of the sky. At the shores of the mighty ocean the gods made humans out of trees, deep in the dark of Ymir's earthy flesh they turned the maggots into dwarves. In this model all parts of the universe were once parts of Ymir, and in a certain sense, and in a certain consciousness, they still are. Ymir, and the dream of primal unity, is still alive in us. What would happen if Ymir would be re-assembled once more?

The *Rig Veda* also describes how a chaos giant called Purusha or simply 'the man' was sacrificed by the younger gods. 'The man' is described as a 'ruler of immortality' who has 'a thousand heads, a

240 Gods and Giants

thousand eyes, a thousand feet'. The gods killed this giant and, as the Purusha-sukta says: 'with the sacrifice the gods sacrificed to the sacrifice. These were the first ritual laws.' It seems that they sacrificed Purusha to Purusha, much like Odin sacrificing himself to himself. The *Rig Veda* goes on in the usual fashion, telling which bits of Purusha were used to form the world. As a special detail, the hide of Purusha was laid out and all the limbs were placed on it. Compare this to the tale how Thor lays a goat's bones on its hide, waves his hammer in the air, and brings the goat to life again. It would be interesting to learn whether the compilers of the *Rig Veda* believed that their ritual brought Purusha to life.

Giants, as they appear in the *Edda*, come in many forms and characters. Some of them are not even terrestrial. The prose *Edda* says that the gods made the world ocean out of Ymir's blood. They formed earth in the centre and laid the world ocean around it in a circle 'so it may seem impossible for most to come over'. Who precisely could come over? The answer is given by King Har (Odin):

It (the earth) is round at the outside and around it lies the deep world ocean. Around the seashores beyond it, they (the gods) gave dwelling places to the giant races and around the earth they erected a fortress against the attacks of the giants, and this fortress they created out of the eyebrows of Ymir, and they called the fortress Midgard (*Gylf. 8*).

A nice description would be that the middle world is rooted in the 'third eye' of the old chaos giant, around it flows the world ocean which is girdled by the serpent of the deep. Beyond that serpent comes the void, and beyond that, the seashores of the giants.

Nordic folk legends frequently feature evil giants. What exactly their evil consists of is not entirely clear. The eddic gods can be quite as amoral as the giants, although they are not half as bad as human beings when it comes to basic stupidity and cruelty. Most of the giants are not bad but simply extreme in their little habits. Some of them are famed for their ancient wisdom - see the *Vafthrudnismal*, which relates how Odin travels to a giant for a riddle contest, or the song of the Hyndla, which

has the love goddess Freya raising a 'houndish' giant lady from her tomb. Not all gods share this tolerant attitude. Closer to peasant morality is Thor, the hammer-wielder, god of lightning and fertility, who goes round and hits giants for the fun of it. As Odin's first-born son, Thor is battling giants who are his own relations. Loki should also be considered a giant, as both of his parents were. Then there is Skadi, goddess of the frozen mountains, who had at least a giant father. Think of Tyr, the one handed Nordic god of war. Tyr has evolved out of the much older common Germanic Tiwaz, Twisto, Zis, Tiu, who was one of the oldest Indo-European deities. The word * Deiw - refers to the height, the divine and the bright sky (god). This ancient deity developed into several distinct gods. As Taranis of the thunderwagon and Teutates of the Oak, the god was known to the Celts of Gaul and Britain, while the German religion divided him into an agricultural thunderer (Donar-Thor) and a war god (Tir, Zis). Tacitus in the *Germania* evokes this sky deity by the name 'Twisto', 'Tuisto' whose name is generally translated as 'two-sexed', i.e. androgynous. According to M. Fuhrmann, Tuisto is a dual-sexed god whose child 'Mannus' (mankind) is the first one-sexed being and the ancestor of humanity. Twisto, the double, twinned or twisted one lies behind the Christian idea and term 'devil'. You can also find the name in the Latin 'Deus', the Greek 'Zeus' or the Indian 'Devas'. In the *Hymiskvidha*, the two expressions of the sky god, Thor and Tyr, travel to the giant Hymir (dark) who is Tyr's father. Hymir lives at the very edge of reality near an ancient stream of poison. Considering that Tyr is a pretty old deity, it could well be that his father originally was Ymir itself. The song describes Tyr's family. His mother is all golden, with a white brow; not so his ancestress, who has 900 ugly heads. Hymir himself comes home with a frozen beard, his step shakes glaciers and his glance shatters stone columns. The *Edda* names him as the guardian of eight magic cauldrons and a sacred chalice.

Tyr may be one of the Aesir, a respectable god invoked by respectable warriors, but the family he grew up in is as ancient as they come. Cauldrons are also known from the tale of the poet's mead, which contains some references to draconian customs. As the tale goes,

242 Gods and Giants

the divine families of the Aesir and the Vanir had a war in the old days. When the fighting was over, they made peace and exchanged hostages. Then the gods all spat into a cauldron and created a being out of the mingled fluids. This creature had human shape and carried the combined wisdom of all the gods in its head. Kwasir was its name; it was all-knowing and not easy to live with. One day, the dwarves Fialar and Glar invited Kwasir to be their guest and killed him. They collected Kwasir's blood in a cauldron and two vats and added honey, so it fermented. The cauldron is called 'Odhrorir' ('to excite the spirit') while the vats are called 'Son' (reconciliation) and 'Bodn' (devotion). Whoever drinks of this mead becomes an inspired poet and seer. The giant Suttung ('heavy with drink', i.e. with what has been seething) forced the dwarves to give the mead in lieu of payment for a slain brother and hid the three vessels in the depth of the Hnita mountain. The full story, how Odin stole the poet's mead, can be found in the prose *Edda*. Suffice it to say that Odin bored a hole into the Hnita mountain with his drill 'rat' and climbed through the hole in person, having first assumed the shape of a worm or snake. Once inside, he seduced the giant-daughter Gunnlod, and after three wild nights won a drink from her. As could have been expected, Odin emptied the cauldron and both vats and then flew home, upside down and backward, closely pursued by Suttung in eagle costume. Coming to Asgard, Odin spat the mead into some cauldrons, while Thor finished Suttung with a hammer blow.

Winning cauldrons from the otherworld is a popular theme in German and Celtic mythology. These cauldrons are often related to dragons, as in the legends of the red and the white dragons. The Hnita mountain, where the poet's mead was kept, may well be identical with the Nida mountain mentioned in *Voluspa* 64. The verse describes how, after the end of the world, the death dragon Nidhoggur ('to crouch beneath') comes flying over the new world. On its wings it carries the souls of the dead, and maybe these were meant to repopulate the world.

The symbolism of the dragon and the cauldron appears in many draconian cults. The Chinese 'Cult of the Ku', (as described by Kenneth Grant in *Hecate's Fountain*) makes use of a bowl, vase or vessel, which

contains various fluids of the usual sort, and houses a Ku-spirit. What such spirits are like can be guessed from the spiritual ingredients that go into them - think of spiders, centipedes, beetles, scorpions, snakes, worms, toads, and other creepy things. This cauldron full of noxious blessings is not far from the sort of stuff that witches are *supposed* to cook. Austin Spare made use of a small vase, called 'the earthenware virgin' to fertilise sigils and elemental spirits with fluids, while many Voodoo traditions make use of vessels, bottles, gourds, vases and the like to house and carry spirits. Presiding over 'Hwergelmir' (roaring cauldron) in the depths of the underworld is the Nordic goddess Hel. She is a sinister goddess, half black and half flesh coloured, who dwells in fog and mist, and halls made out of coiling serpents. Nordic mythology attributes the realm of the dead and the unborn to her. 'Some day every man must ride to Hel' says Sigurd the Dragonslayer in the *Fafnismal*, and this rule seems to go for mortals, gods, giants and dragons. The usual dwelling places of Hel are the dark caverns of the deep, the fog veiled forests, the twilight solitude. Her home is known as 'Niflheim' (home of the fog) or 'Helheim'. The *Edda* says that she is a daughter of Loki and Angurboda, which makes her a deity of the giant race. The Vikings saw her as a sinister figure representing the death of themselves and the death of their names and glory.

A similar goddess was known in continental German cultures, and has survived in numerous folk tales. Here the goddess bore such names as Helja, Holle, Holla, Holda, Hilda, Else and Ellhorn. One of these tales was recorded by the Grimm Brothers during their stay in Northern Hessen. For some curious reason, English translators have often turned 'Frau Holle' into 'Mother Hulda', maybe due to some speculations of the Grimm Brothers, who saw Lady Holle as a variation of an earth-mother goddess named Hulda, of whom very little is known. Indeed, nowadays so much more is known about Lady Holle than of the hypothetical Lady Hulda that we might ask if the Grimm Brothers didn't get it the wrong way round. In the Grimm-tale, a young girl falls into a well into an under- or otherworld. There she wanders on her own, and accomplishes some tasks which seem related to the passing of the

244 Gods and Giants

seasons. At last she comes to the cold palace of Lady Holle. 'You can have work, child', says the goddess, who looks kindly enough but has terrifying teeth. 'Here is my bedding. Shake the pillows and blankets and when the feathers fly, snow will fall in the world of men.' The girl does the job with passion, and snowstorms cascade all winter through. As spring comes round again, Lady Holle leads her through a portal, and as she returns to earth, she finds herself clothed in gold. This goddess is considerably kinder than the Icelandic version. Lady Holle was once a popular goddess in central Germany. To this day there are numerous springs, lakes and wells bearing her name, as these were known to be entrances to her otherworldly realm. A mountain in north Hessen was sacred to Lady Holle. There is a deep lake quite high up on the mountain, and women used to go there, to pray to the hidden goddess, to ask for children or to demand that she transformed a weak changeling back into a proper human child. In other places there are rocks sacred to her, or deep cult caves, or mountain tops. In the Taunus mountains, the goddess was known to live high on the summits. When the height disappeared in thick cloud cover, local tradition had it that Lady Holle is cooking blueberries, for juice and jam, in her huge iron cauldron. The *Taunus sagen* say that Lady Holle is living with the old 'storm giant' Wode. Sometimes, when he is out, howling and roaring with the snow-bearing gale, Lady Holle sets up the cauldron, lights a fire, and cooks blueberries. One day, old Wode came home after an especially violent fit of howling, cold, so tired, and very hungry too. From out of Lady Holle's stone house, a wonderful scent came drifting. 'Wow', said he 'my favourite. Blueberry jam! Hey Holle, old girl, could I have some?' 'Later dear. First unthaw your beard, please ... the jam is much too hot yet.' 'Not for me!' roared wild Wode, and took a great gulp out of the cauldron. 'Aaargh!' (Note for forgetful readers: the Indo-European root *Ergh means 'to move heavily, to tremble, to be excited, to quiver'.) 'You big fool... I told you it's too hot. Why don't you blow a little to cool the broth?' He did. He blew, and not just a little, but in the fashion of a highly enervated storm giant with a burned mouth after a long night on duty. The howling gale roared straight into the

cauldron. Have you ever seen a god with a face full of jam?

In Denmark and southern Scandinavia, the goddess had the name Huldra, whose children 'Huldre folk' were the trolls, elves, dwarves and night creatures. In Norway, she appeared as a forest deity. Seen from in front, she appeared as a beautiful lady, moving gracefully through the dark spruce and pine forests. Seen from behind, her lithe figure revealed a gaping hole, as the deity is thoroughly empty and void. Indeed, the names 'Holle, Hel, Huldra' all go back to the term 'hollow'. In Germany, the term 'Hollen' is occasionally used for elves and fairy folk. In more than one legend, the Hollen are said to dwell on certain mountain tops where great rocks mark former sites of worship. God or gods granted immortality to the Hollen, as they have kind hearts, on the condition that they do not leave their dwelling places.

Where is a counterpart to Helja in the Celtic myths? One likely candidate is the Cailleach, the 'divine hag', whose worship is attested in Scotland and Ireland. The Cailleach is often known as a guardian of wells and springs, and these were highly sacred sites in the old pagan days. In a Scottish tradition, the Cailleach is a deer goddess who drives the herds over the mountains. There was a Scots belief that the farmer who finished harvesting later than all the others would have to feed a hungry hag, the Cailleach, all winter through. (See A. Carmichael). It is a typical characteristic of the Cailleach that she can transform her shape, and appear as a horrid crone or lovely maiden as she will. A lively description of the hag aspect was given by Anne Ross, who quotes an Irish text in her *Pagan Celtic Britain*:

There were two slender spears of battle
 Upon either side of the hag; (Caillich)
 Her face was blue black, the lustre of coal
 And her bone tufted tooth was like rusted bone.
 In her head was one deep pool-like eye
 Swifter than a star in a winter sky;
 Upon her head gnarled brushwood
 Like the clawed old wood of aspen root.
 In the old Irish tradition there were several fierce war-goddesses,



such as the Badb, Nemain and Macha. These were commonly referred to by a group name, which is also the name of a battle goddess, namely the Morrigan. The Morrigan has much in common with the Cailleach, and is sometimes, as in the text above, referred to by that name. The Morrigan's special talent was to inspire terror in the hearts of bold warriors. She paralysed the limbs and slowed the blow, and later, after the battle, she assumed the form of the carrion crow (or raven) to glut her hunger on the slain. Within the black chalice of her body, she carried the dead to the otherworlds. You will find a good description of the Morrigan in the *Tain Bo Cuailnge* where she courts the great Irish hero Cu Chulainn. To suit the occasion, the Morrigan assumed the shape of a beautiful young lady and introduced herself to the hero, saying that her father is one Buan (the eternal one) and wouldn't Cu Chulainn like to make love with her? Cu Chulainn, standing knee deep in the corpses of slain enemies (the goddess had appeared to him on the battlefield) was unwise enough to refuse her. Infuriated, the goddess departed, with the dire promise that she would return in the hours of his greatest need to destroy him utterly. Later in the saga, when Cu Chulainn was fighting in a ford (i.e. in-between the worlds in a classic 'abyss' situation) the Morrigan came for him. As a hornless red heifer she led a herd of cattle through the river, which confused the hero for a moment, and allowed his enemies to wound him. Next, she assumed the form of a great eel. Appearing out of the water's muddy depths, she coiled around the hero's legs, allowing his foes to wound him once more, and a third time she came and assaulted him as a raving wolf. On each occasion, Cu Chullainn was mortally wounded, which did not seem to upset him much. During each assault, the Morrigan had received a wound from the hero, and as a half-god, the hero was quite capable of hurting a deity. Badly wounded, the Morrigan assumed the Cailleach form and appeared to the hero as an aged crone, leading a half-dead cow with three tits. From these, the hero received three refreshing draughts of milk, and in turn, blessed the hag thrice. These blessings restored the Morrigan to her former health. Taunting the hero she transformed into a crow and flew to the highest branch of a bramble

248 Gods and Giants

bush. John Matthews describes a Cailleach legend that has the goddess wandering through the land. From her skirt she drops all sorts of objects - mountains, hills, rivers, cliffs, etc., and forms the landscape. This story has a close parallel in central Germany, where it is the wicked pagan giant-princess Trendula who has the landscape drop out of her skirts.

In some parts of Germany, it was not Wode but Lady Holle who led the wild hunt howling through the night. Notions of death varied in Pagan northern Europe. Celtic tribes are well attested for their head-hunting customs. Heads of slain enemies were valuable trophies, which were put on spikes in the living room. These gory items served religious purposes and were useful conversation pieces. Greek traders reported that the Celts valued their head collections considerably and refused to sell any of their skulls, no matter how much gold they were offered. The head was considered as the essence of a person. Using a head, its former owner could be contacted in the otherworld, which explains why the Celts collected the heads of enemies and family heads as well, and honoured both sorts. A good example for the veneration of heads can be found in the *Mabinogi* of Branwen. Here it is the head of Bran that his friends carry home to Britain after Bran's assassination. There is great magick in the head of Bran. In one of the most haunting scenes of the *Mabinogi*, the heroes arrive in Britain. They find solace in a wonderful palace where their wounds are healed and every day the birds of Rhiannon sing for them sweetly. The head of Bran does not rot, but remains fresh and vigorous, and Bran speaks with them everyday. For 80 years the 'assembly of the wondrous head' feasted with their dead friend Bran, and enjoyed themselves better than ever before. After that time, one of the assembly opened a forbidden door, which broke the spell. The palace became a ruined fisher's hut, and the head had to be buried pretty fast. For a while, the head of Bran was buried in Tower Hill, where its might protected the entire island from invaders. Legend says that King Arthur decided to have it dug up again, as he didn't want his people to put too much faith in the protective virtues of a skull. Bran, by the way, appears as a semi-divine figure in the *Mabinogi*. If you consider his huge size (too big for a house, too big for a ship, capable

of walking across the Irish Sea) you might be excused for mistaking him for a giant.

Nordic sagas relate that the Vanir gods received two hostages after their war with the Aesir deities: good-looking Honir who goes through much of the *Edda* as a silent observer, and wise Mimir, a giant and god often associated with wells and waters that flow under the earth. Now Honir was a splendid prince, but also a bit slow. Whenever the Vanir asked him a difficult question, he reply was 'I'll have to ask Mimir'. As Mimir was wise in all hidden things, the Vanir found it hard to trick the two. After a while, Mimir's scheming annoyed the Vanir so much that they chopped off his head and politely returned it to Asgard in a bag. Odin took the head and treated it with herbs so it did not decay and he spoke with it every day. Irish mythology favours smoking the heads to conserve them, which must have been a ghastly operation. The smoke and heat made the dead faces 'come to life' as the dead flesh shrivelled, and at this time it was easiest to make contact with the souls of their owners. Given this sort of belief-structure, the dying were lucky when it was their relations who picked up their heads after battle. Warriors who died without ritual, whose heads were stolen or eaten by wild beasts were in a worse situation. A Welsh legend claims that such unhappy souls gathered north of Hadrian's Wall, in the wild forest of Celyddon, where all sorts of twilight creatures dwelled. Count Tolstoy in *The Coming of the King* gives a lively impression of this belief:

A valiant death, the subject of the songs of bards in the halls of their sons and their sons' sons, was what all desired at their ending. But a death sudden and unexpected left the warrior unskilled to guide his fate, and his spirit ill-prepared for its journey. Men told of the shades of men so slain that they were doomed to flit aimlessly like moths for the space of a year in the darkest groves of the forest of Celyddon.

It may come as a surprise when the well known goddess of love, known as Freya in Iceland and Norway, and as Fria or Frea in Britain, Sweden and Germany, is associated with draconian lore. According to the *Edda*, Frey and Freya are the children of the ocean god Njord. The

250 Gods and Giants

latter was one of the hostages that the Vanir gods sent to the Aesir to ensure peace. Njord was known as 'the wealthy one' as the oceans were inexhaustibly rich, and his children had much to do with rural fertility. Frey could be considered the personification of sexual potency while Freya was well known to be loving unto all. More than one text in the *Edda* hints at her promiscuity, and indeed the goddess took most of the gods as a lover, which includes cunning Loki, several dwarves and her own brother. Promiscuity and incest were not encouraged in Viking society, which poses the question if the love-goddess Freya may not come from an older culture. Freya means 'the beloved' and refers, like most of the pagan god-names, not to a person but to a function. In this sense, Freya manifests wherever people honestly love each other. To the refined Skalds of Viking times who brought the eddic poems to their final perfection, the all-loving ways of Freya were a frequent theme. In the *Lokasenna*, Loki accuses Freya of incest. It is her father, Njord, who answers for Freya, and jovially declares that it does no harm if 'the beautiful ones' choose their mates as they will. If Freya's behaviour seemed indecent to the Vikings, her father's apology, which supports it, must have been worse. If Freya's conduct was in keeping with the morals of her father, we might wonder if the Vanir gods had a different code of ethics. It seemed quite normal to old Njord that women take their lovers as they will. Loki's reply to Njord, insulting as ever, informs us that in the land of the Vanir, the daughters of the giant (H) Ymir used to piss into Njord's mouth.

Hymir is one of the oldest giants in the *Edda* who lives at the very east of the world, close to that primal stream of poison and elixir, the Eliwagar ('thundering or roaring floods'), which come flowing out of Hel's cauldron Hwergelmir ('roaring cauldron'). These fluids formed the ice that covers the northern parts of the primal void, and the mists that rose from them went into the creation of the ancestor of all gods and giants, Ymir. It is possible that in an earlier time, Ymir and (H) Ymir were a single entity, which would make Hymir's daughters ancient ladies indeed. According to the *Hymiskvida*, the tale of Hymir, that old giant was the guardian of several magical cauldrons. What, then, should

we make of Loki's taunting remark? When the daughters of (H)Ymir pissed into Njord's mouth, was this event an insult or a sacrament? Similar claims have been made of the tantriks of the Left-hand-path tradition, who were considered 'unclean' due to their veneration of magically transformed body fluids and excrements.

I would like to mention a few surprising observations on the use of urine in medicine and magick. To modern people, urine is a taboo substance. In 1882, Robert Koch identified the tuberculosis bacteria, and discovered that if the person is infected they can be found in the urine. This made urine a dangerous substance, just like excrement, as people feared they might catch an infection from it. From that time, urine was only used to diagnose certain diseases. Before, urine used to be applied as a curative. In the Middle Ages, for instance, European doctors developed what they called a 'pharmacy of dirt', which made use of most body-secretions. Urine was considered a highly useful medicine. It was used, in small amounts, to heal some diseases of the eyes, inflamed ears, warts and infected wounds. Many a soldier used to piss on his wounds to disinfect them, a method that was rediscovered in World War II when disinfectants were hard to obtain. Before surgery, the patient had to piss on the scalpels and instruments, which seems to have worked. Gargling with urine was a well known cure for the common cold, bronchitis, diphtheria or sore throats, and a *Universal-lexicon* of 1747 mentions that a few sips of morning urine, drunk every day, fortify the body against the black plague.

Obviously, people were less fussy in those days. Urine was literally a 'household' substance, especially when it had aged and ripened for a few days. Old urine ferments and produces ammoniac. This substance was named after the ram-headed god Ammon, in whose Egyptian temple the substance was produced, possibly out of the urine of sacred goats and sheep. Ammoniac can be used like soap. Together with wool-fat it becomes a useful, foaming washing agent. The Romans used this method; they had a special caste, the fullones, who collected the urine from public lavatories and used it to wash clothing. At that time, the noble Romans preferred to have their washing done out of doors, or

252 Gods and Giants

even out of the city. The fullones were despised for their job, but also extremely well paid. Urine was also used to tann hides and to conserve colours. If you have a genuine oriental carpet and spill water over it, maybe you will smell the remnants of camel urine. Urine was also used by the German and Celtic people to wash clothing. Pliny the Elder tells us that to wash themselves they actually used a soap made from goat-lard and beech wood ash, with a touch of bramble berry juice to give a reddish tinge to the hair. Early Greek and Roman medicine is full of cures using urine. The same can be observed in India, where urine therapy is popular to this day. Take the ex-prime minister Morarji Desai. At the age of 81 this charming old man amazed the world by admitting that he drunk a small cup of his early morning urine every day to which he attributed his longevity. On 28th February 1995, the former prime minister Morarji Desai reached the age of 100. He attributed it to urine drinking and a diet forbidding all meat, starch and sugar. Raodji-Bhai Manibhai Patel, who published a book on urine therapy in 1959 equates urine with the 'waters of Shiva'. The text advises the practitioner to ingest some of the early morning urine, but to avoid the first and last drops as they are not considered clean enough. When Western doctors examine urine, they also make use of the early morning dosis, and like their Indian counterparts, they only use the 'middle stream', as the first and last drops contain too much waste. The Indian 'Bharat-Sevak Samadj' organisation advertises urine therapy all over India. These people believe that their urine contains nourishment, which shouldn't be wasted. As a result, they drink quite a lot of their urine, which would really strain their kidneys if they did not also adhere to a very strict diet forbidding all salt, spices, meat, alcohol, tea and so on. As modern studies show, urine is rich in vitamins, hormones and minerals, and contains a mild disinfectant. Some natural healers recommend the ingestion of small amounts -if not homeopathic doses - to stimulate the immune system. They insist that people should only drink or apply their own urine, to avoid infection, and most classic therapies agree. There are, however, some cases known where people used the urine of a child or youth for therapy, or even more common, for magick.

Several systems of yoga advise the yogi to drink early morning urine, which is said to soothe the mind. M. Mills and T. Faunce of the University of Newcastle, New South Wales, hypothesise that this effect comes from the melatonin which is contained in the morning urine. Melatonin is produced by the pinal gland during the night. The substance is currently being researched as a highly efficient sedative. The urine of children is known to be even more melatonin-rich than that of adults. According to Mills and Faunce, at least a month of daily drinking is required before effects can be observed. No doubt this 'soothing' effect can be increased by the proper belief-structure. If you believe that the stuff produces a certain 'peace of mind', your mind may be inclined to charge it with more melatonin than usual. In this context it may be useful to remember that the human mind-body system is a fantastic refinery of consciousness-changing chemicals.

When we come to the topic of magical urine-ceremonies, we could distinguish between practitioners who charge and drink their own urine, and those cults where a chosen priest/ess produces the desired elixir, which is drunk by the assembly. In either case, the urine has to undergo a specific transformation to work its desired effect. I would like to thank Kenneth Grant for the kind permission to quote from our private correspondence (8th April 1994):

Concerning the imbibition of urine, this has been used in the East for medicinal purposes since antiquity, but in the rite of the Bhairavi Diksha the substance has been previously *charged* by the risen fire snake, otherwise it remains a mere bodily medicine with no magical and spiritual effect. Many of the wild dances celebrated almost everywhere in the ancient world were, among initiates, designed to awaken the fire snake for this purpose, after which imbibition gave great siddhis.'

It seems clear that urine acquires its peculiar magical effects by being charged and refined through various forms of ecstasies and enlightenment. The classical form of Kundalini yoga of the Hindus, the Tibetan rite of transferring consciousness, Crowley's 'Liber HHH' and the practice of seidr-shuddering are all efficient in that they stimulate the

254 Gods and Giants

brain and the glands to produce and release neurotransmitters and hormones, i.e. chemicals that induce changes of consciousness. If you raise your kundalini (to whatever chakra), the rite will change your mind. The chemicals which induce this change - and this is just speculation awaiting a proper scientific analysis - may possibly make their way into the urine. Drinking the substance may re-induce the ecstatic state in the practitioner. Could it be that the same urine, when imbibed by other people, produces equal changes in their awareness? Many of the draconian cults believed that this communion works, and developed systems to produce a wide variety of different elixirs, with different effects on consciousness. To later cults, who had lost the essential secrets of the draconians, the imbibition of the body's secretions appeared abominable. Often enough, the young, solar-oriented cults persecuted the draconians and forced them to hide in obscurity, thus making them veritable 'cults of the shadow'. It is an interesting fact that certain animals who feed on excretions and secretions, were likewise persecuted or considered as unlucky. According to *Chambers Book of Scottish Superstitions*, the fishermen refrained from saying the taboo words 'rat, hare, fox, rabbit, pig, dog' when aboard a ship. You may notice that there are several draconian power-beasts on this list. Dogs are well known to feed on excrements if given half a chance. Hares and rabbits have a similar custom, which is called refection.

These animals produce two sorts of dung. The common sort is dry, firm and contains few vitamins. In the early morning, however, these animals produce a special, wet sort of manure that is full of vitamin B¹. This dung is eaten as soon as it comes out of the body, our furry friends feeding on their own behind like the worm Orouboros. Perhaps Freya's power beasts should be viewed in the same light. The *Edda* mentions that the wagon of Freya is pulled by cats, but in other texts we find her even more closely related to wild boars. Frey and Freya are said to ride the boar 'Gullinbursti', which means 'gold-bristle'. Pigs and boars are among the draconian beasts par excellence, which may come from the fact that pigs eat everything, including corpses, excrement and other

forbidden substances. Few beasts were as popular among the German and Celtic tribes as the pigs and wild boars. Boar figures featured prominently on top of helmets, priests chewed pork while making prophecy, pork was the favourite food of the warriors and chieftains, and when a noble died, a joint of pork was placed in the grave to feed the soul on its voyage to the unknown. In German and Celtic mythology, pigs were not considered 'unclean' but sacred, which may come from the fact that pork was usually prepared by boiling it in a cauldron. Boiling pig is much safer than frying it as it disinfects the meat more thoroughly. In a certain sense, the pigs were considered as beasts from the otherworld. According to the *Mabinogi* which is full of myths dealing with pigs, the first pigs that came to Wales were gifts from the otherworld Annwn, and in Valhall, the Nordic otherworld, there is an ever re-growing pig from which the souls of slain heroes derive their nourishment. In this respect, I would like to direct your attention to the tale *How Culhwch won Olwen* from the *Mabinogi*.

Quite fittingly, the name of the hero means 'pig run' and the story details how he won the giant-daughter Olwen ('white track') with a little help from Arthur's warriors. Olwen's father, the fierce chief giant Ysbaddaden, set dozens of 'impossible' tasks for the hero, including the hunt for two mighty boars. One is the 'chief boar Ysgithyrwyn' ('white tusk') while the other, known as 'Twrch Trwyth' ('boar') appears like a primal spirit of destruction. Chasing the latter ruined most of Britain and had Arthur's warriors fighting for days, yet in the end they only managed to slay the piglets, while the horrid Twrch Trwyth leapt into the sea, to swim to stranger shores. Considering the piglets, I wonder if the 'boar' was a sow. The sacred sow Hen Wen is a similar, but more benevolent creature of Welsh mythology. On her mad flight across the land and sea, she dropped children as she ran, such as bees, wheat, barley, a wolf, an eagle and a kitten that grew to giant size.

A touching scene comes from the poems of Myrddin, as they are recorded in the *Black Book of Carmarthen*. Count Tolstoy has shown that 'Myrddin', the historical 'Merlin', was a seer, possibly a Druid, living in the 6th century Wales. From what we know, Myrddin lived a

256 Gods and Giants

rich and honoured life until the battle of Arderrydd (or Arfderydd), when he saw his patron, King Gwenddolau and much of his own family slain, and became mad. Screeching like a lost soul, Myrddin fled the battlefield and sought solace in the dark forest of Celyddon, where he dwelled amidst the shadows of the slain, himself a shadow of his former self. In his sorry state 'Snow to my thighs, surrounded by wolves, icicles in my hair, my glory gone', Myrddin is accompanied by power beasts. In the poem *The Oh's of Myrddin*, the seer prophesies the future of Britain (always a popular theme) to a little pig, who is addressed quite lovingly at the beginning of each verse, (trans. Meirion Pennar)

Oh little piglet, sow in heat,
My covering is threadbare, I have no peace.
Since the battle of Arfderydd it doesn't matter to me
Even if the sky falls down and the oceans flood the earth.

In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, it is an aged wolf who listens to the raving of the mad prophet. Like pigs, wolves and dogs may eat carrion and carry the dead to the otherworlds. That these sinister aspects of pig-behaviour were well known to the island Celts is more than obvious in the *Mabinogi*. Read the fourth branch, for instance, which tells how radiant Llew was assassinated, and describes how Gwydyon searched for Llew's soul, which he found with the help of a hungry sow.

Gwydyon walked under the tree to see what she was feeding on, and he found her eating rotten flesh and maggots. Then he looked up into the top of the tree and there was an eagle; when the eagle shook, worms and rotten flesh fell away and the sow would eat. Gwydyon thought that the eagle was Llew, so he sang this englyn:

An oak grows between two lakes.
Dark sky and glen.
If I speak truly
This comes from Llew's feathers
(trans. Gantz)

Soon enough the soul of Llew, wretched and miserable as it is, descends

the tree and comes to Gwydyon, who transformed it into human shape - 'nothing but skin and bone', as the *Mabinogi* puts it.

I find it interesting that many people think of pigs and boars as stupid creatures. In my forest walks, I have often come upon groups of wild boar, which are quite common in our mountains. Boars have a reputation of being savage fighters and if you listen to hunters' tales, you'd get the idea that they are the most terrifying monsters in the world. 'They can read thoughts' the hunters have been saying for centuries, which is not especially difficult given the average mental abilities of those hunters. If you meet a wild animal in the forests, chances are that it will be shy and run or walk away. Roe deer, with their small brains and jittery nerves, flee very easily, and have little choice about it. Red deer are usually more self-confident. When they sense you coming, they tend to step into some trees, and wait until you are past. Red deer and boar know very well that humans are predictable creatures who tend to use the same paths every day. These beasts have learned that many people walk, jog or cycle in the forest, and got used to it. In a sense, their learning has become stronger than their instincts, which seems a sign of intelligence to me.

I remember one sunny morning in early winter. I was climbing up a slope full of big rocks and fallen trees when behind a boulder, a young boar, a yearling, appeared. It did not notice me, but snorted happily among the twigs and leaves on the ground. Then the mother appeared, her bristles shining in the early sun. The wind was favourable for me, so it was a while before she noticed my presence. Instead of panicking, she seemed to give me a long look (boars are pretty short-sighted), thought a bit, and then called for her child softly. I have rarely heard such gentle and soothing sounds. Soon the yearling ran to her, and she leisurely led it away, glancing back at me every so often. This sow did not react by instinct but by choice.

Or take the boar males. At the age of four or five, the males leave the group. They stay in small male groups for a while, then they become moody and prefer a solitary existence. One day I was busy searching for bones and quartz crystals. I had come deeply into a thicket of dark

258 Gods and Giants

spruce trees and was slowly wandering uphill. Suddenly, the ground before me shook, and out of a mud bath the head and back of a boar appeared. It was a surprise for both of us. Luckily, the boar felt too lazy to make a scene and simply told me to get lost. Slowly I walked backwards, and the boar was content.

On another occasion, I walked right into a herd. It was a dark night; I wore dark clothes, and a nearby brook obscured all sounds. I remember noticing two large rocks, close to the path, which shouldn't have been there. I was less than three steps away when they suddenly moved and grunted. So I stopped instantly and began to talk with them gently, in a calm and slow voice. Further down the slope, other sows were giving screams of alarm, and youngsters were running hither and yon. The two big sows remained with me until all the others had disappeared, and then left briskly. Sows have a reputation of being fierce defenders of their young. I have always found them intelligent and considerate. Since then, I have often chanced on groups of boar, especially at night. Sometimes I have upset them by appearing among them with no warning, and this can be dangerous with wild animals. Each time, a couple of sows surrounded me while the others rushed off. I found it useful to speak with them, especially when in total darkness, as the sows get more edgy when they can't localise you. Nowadays, after more than fifty encounters with wild boars, I tend to leave certain places alone in certain seasons. If I have to pass through boar-country at night, I tend to be more noisy than usual, or to make music, especially when they have their young. This way, the boars get a good advance warning, meaning that they can think before acting. I am fairly certain that the older ones know me personally. They do not flee when they hear me coming, but only retreat a few steps, and wait. Funny sounds, music and prayer interests them. More than once have I made music in the forest, only to find half an hour later that there was a boar in the bushes nearby, listening with great interest. Small bells, cymbals, kalimba and string instruments may attract them, maybe as these sounds are unlike any they know from their wildwood environment.

Irish mythology contains reference to a number of monstrous giants

which could easily be compared to the Lovecraftian 'Ancient Ones'. As these creatures were a strong influence in Irish proto-history, I would like to give their tale with some detail. The first people who are said to have settled in Ireland was named the race of Partholon. These people came, as is common in Irish mythology, from some mysterious 'otherworld', and arrived on the shore of Ireland on the first of May, some 312 years after the flood. The legends say that at this time, Ireland was still tiny, consisting only of a treeless plain, watered by three lakes and nine rivers. At first, the tribe of Partholon was small and consisted of only twenty-four couples. As these increased, so did the land they inhabited, and soon enough they came upon entities of another race. These people, or creatures, were called the 'Tuatha de Domnu', that is, the tribes of the goddess Domnu. The word 'Domnu' is not easy to translate. It seems to mean 'the deep' or 'the abyss'. They were also known as the 'Fomors' or 'Fomoirs', which is generally translated as 'from under the sea', though there is an alternative interpretation linking them to the word 'nightmare' (Maier 1994). According to the myths, the Fomors seem to have settled in Ireland even before the people of Partholon came, so it comes as no surprise that soon enough, the two races began to wage war.

It is not easy to estimate if the people of Partholon ought to be classed as gods or mortals. The Fomors, however, seem to have had a number of rather inhuman creatures in their ranks. Some of the Fomors were apparently in human shape, and handsome as well, such as good-looking Bress whose beauty became proverbial. Others appeared as monsters, such as the creature Mata, which had four heads and 100 feet. Other Fomors were graced with the heads of beasts, such as goats or horses. The father of the dreaded Bile, or Balor, had the head of a bull, for instance. Other Fomors were deformed (by human standards) and one of them had to make do with but a single arm and leg. Folklore being as fantastic as ever, we find a reflection of this entity as 'the lord of the beasts' in the romance of 'Owain' (see the *Mabinogi*) and in some folk-spells of Wales and Ireland which apparently require the sorcerer to stand on one leg, keeping one hand behind the back and one eye shut

260 Gods and Giants

while muttering the incantation. In the first war, Partholon defeated a giant monster named 'Cichol the Footless', ('The Footless' might refer to a serpent), who was the Fomorian leader and drove the Fomors out of Ireland. The peace did not last for long. The race of Partholon increased until they numbered 5000. Then, on a fatal 1st May, a plague came over the people of Partholon. Between two Sundays they all died. All, that is, except for one Tuan, who seems to have been a descendent of Partholon's brother. Tuan survived, though he knew not why, and roamed the empty island 'from hill to hill' for 22 years. Next, the people of Nemed came to Ireland. Though Tuan was closely related to Nemed, he would not go and meet him. From a secret place he watched his relations land. He was so old, weary and miserable after 22 years of isolation that the invaders scared him. So Tuan hid, and evaded the people of Nemed, until one night, as he was sleeping in a cave, a transformation came over him. Tuan awoke to find himself in the shape of a stag, healthy, young and powerful.

While Tuan roamed the Irish hills in the company of deer, the people of Nemed increased. Then the Fomorians returned, and war began. Though the people of Nemed fought bravely, they lost the war. Another plague came and killed most of them. The survivors were oppressed by the Fomors, and as they lacked a king, could not resist them. Soon enough, the Fomors ruled Ireland and imposed a staggering tax on the people of Nemed. Two thirds of the milk, the grain and the children of each year had to be delivered to the Fomors every Samhain (the milk must have been a bit over-ripe by then). Soon the people of Nemed rose in revolt. Fighting desperately, they managed to take the enemy stronghold, the 'tower of glass' on Tory Island. There they slew Conann, King of the Fomors, but his step-brother More came with a huge army across (or from under) the sea and brought bloody retaliation on the people of Nemed. Only 30 survived. These took to their ships and, as the legends say, either they all died or they returned to their original country. By then, Tuan had become old and weary once more. He retired to his cave, fasted three days, and transformed into a boar. As you have probably noticed, there is a certain amount of similarity to

these two tales. Some scholars have speculated that the two tales were originally only one tale, and indeed there are some indications that the tale of Partholon is not as old as that of Nemed. Seen from a linguist's point of view, 'Partholon', as it begins with a 'P', is as un-Goidelic a name as they come. The older Celtic people found in Britain and Ireland had no 'P' in their language. The use of the letter 'P' is characteristic for the Brythonic Celts, who invaded Britain some time later, possibly from Belgia. Thus, linguistic science distinguishes between the old Goidelic 'Q' Celts and the younger Brythonic 'P' Celts - and offers any amount of speculation on the question if the old 'Q' Celts correspond with the 'Hallstatt phase' (750-450 BC) and the 'P' Celts with the 'La Tene' period (400-100 BC).

A curious parallel to the plague story can be found in the tale of *Lludd and Llevelys (Mabinogi)*. The tower or castle of glass (amber?) is a common element of north European mythology, see in particular Taliesin's poem *The Spoils of Annwn*, and *Helrunar*, page 104-5. If the Fomors were 'demons' (as some have it) we need not ask for a historical significance in the tale. If they represent humans who worshipped 'demons', as is quite possible, then their tale ought to be examined for parallels with Plato's *Atlantis* text. Could the Fomorians be Atlanteans?

The next wave of settlers was led by one Semion, the son of Stariath. He led several tribes to Ireland, that is, the Fir Domnann, the Fir Bolg and the Fir Galium (Gallion), who split up the island among themselves. Tuan was still a boar at the time, grunting, snorting, and making little piglets. After many years with the boar herds of Ireland, he felt old age approaching. So he retired to his old cave, fasted for three days, and passed into the shape of a hawk.

A hawk today, a boar yesterday,

Wonderful... inconstancy!

begins the song with which he greeted the new era.

Then came a new race to Ireland. Beothach, the son of Iarbone, the prophet led the 'Tuatha de Danann' (tribes of the goddess Dana) to the green island. Where these people came from is a controversial question. Some texts claim 'the north', others 'the southern isles of the world'.

262 Gods and Giants

Tuan, who was an eye-witness to their landing, proposes that the Tuatha de Danann '... came from heaven, on account of their intelligence and for the excellence of their knowledge.' The Tuatha de Danann, though they appear humanoid, should not be considered people but deities. A good many of them were venerated by the island Celts. Not long after their arrival (on a first of May as usual), the people of Dana found themselves fighting the three tribes who were already established in Ireland. For this aim, all parties used magick and enchantment. The legends speak of 'Druidic mists' and claim that for three days it rained blood and fire on the Fir Bolg. Rains of fire and blood are another common mythologic element, which can be found in several Celtic tales (see the legend of Mogg Ruith for a vivid example), in the *Edda*, the *Kalevala*, the *Bible*, the *Ipuwer Papyrus* and other ancient texts. These stories seem all related to a great cataclysm (real or imaginary) which is rather well researched in the work of Immanuel Velikovsky. After this, the Fir Bolg and their allies were not interested in fighting the people of Dana any more. They made treaties, exchanged hostages, and united against the Fomors, who were just returning to Ireland. Unluckily, the Fomorian host was much stronger than the bright deities of the Tuatha de Danann. Their leader was the famous Bile, or Balor, of the evil eye. As a youth, Balor had attempted to spy on some wizards of his father, and had tried to peer into the room where they worked their darksome arts. A cloud of noxious smoke arose from the wizards' cauldron, and when it reached young Balor's eye, this eye became as evil and death-dealing as the broth of the cauldron itself. Balor was only permitted to live on the condition that he kept his deadly eye shut. For when it was opened (using a huge hook) its gaze had the power to petrify. In the great war of the Fomors and the Tuatha de Danann (which lasted several years) Balor attempted to petrify his enemies. Before he had his eye properly open, the radiant god Lugh of the Long Hand hurled a magical missile through it, which slew Balor and a number of Fomors who had the bad luck of being looked at by their dying leader. Lugh's missile was a concrete ball called the 'Tathlum'. A recipe for making a tathlum has come to us: what you need

to compose it is load blood, blood of furious bears, blood of noble lions, blood of vipers and of Osmuinn's trunks (?), sand of the Armorian sea and sand of the Red Sea. The poem says that all of these had to be purified first, and don't ask me how. (See Squire)

Balor's death turned the battle in favour of the people of Dana, and soon the Fomors were destroyed or driven away. In the shape of a hawk, Tuan watched the great victory. But time moves on, seasons follow each other, and one bright day the next group of invaders arrived in Ireland. These were 'the sons of Mil' who came from the land of the Skythians over Egypt and Spain to Ireland. Their crafty old Druid Amairgen White Knee led the invasion by means of magic. He invoked the three patron goddesses of Ireland, Banba, Fotla and Eriu (Eire) and promised to each of them that her name should be a name of Ireland forever. Having thus won their support, the people of Mil fought the people of Dana and drove them to exile under the hollow hills. To this day there are numerous mounds and barrows in Ireland which are thought to house the Tuatha de Danann in some sort of otherworld. Tuan watched all this. He saw the people of Dana die or descend into their 'fairy mounds', and old age and sadness came over him once more. Then he retired to his cave. This time, he moved into the shape of a great river salmon. As such, he was young and strong again, and explored all the rivers and lakes of Ireland. With the passing of years, the Milesian Celts increased, and Tuan found it hard to evade their spears and fish hooks. At a fated time, Tuan was caught, and served on the table of King Cairell. The wife of King Cairell ate of the salmon and became pregnant. Nine months later she gave birth to a child and named it Tuan. It came as a surprise to the court that young Tuan, though still a baby, was already a fully trained seer and capable of relating the entire history of Ireland. Tuan was, by the way, not the only 'wonderful child' in island Celtic mythology. The Merlin of Geoffrey's *History of the Kings of Britain* and the Taliesin of the *Hanes Taliesin* both made their first appearance as babies able to speak with the eloquence of trained bards. That this mythological motif was so popular shows how the ideas of reincarnation were commonly accepted by the storytellers.



IMBAS TOROSNA

18 Visions of Taliesin

There is a lake in Wales which was once called Llyn Tegid. Its cold waters came, wave upon wave to wash the shores, where in earlier times a valley had been, rich with green, with gentle slopes and grazing herds of cattle. There was a town in the valley which bore the name Bala. A sparkling stream had flowed across the land and blessed was the soul who drank from its waters. Its source, shadowed by alders and hazel bushes, was a sacred spring, well known to young and old alike for its healing powers. To honour the source, Druids had established a shrine bearing the emblem of a head, and artisans had built a well to contain the spring. A heavy stone lid sealed the well; on days of festivity and celebration the lid was opened and the sacred waters flowed from the deep.

Alas, one fateful day a priest forgot his duties and failed to seal the gate that led into the deep. During the night the waters rushed up from below, flooding glade and hillside, rushing in foam-crested torrents to devour the land that had confined them. By daybreak, all was transformed. Gone were the meadows, gone the cattle, gone the houses and the trees. In their place a dark lake stretched out, its gleaming surface veiling a sunken land.

In the time of Arthur there was a castle near the lake, and noble folk lived in it. Some say that this story happened on an island in the lake. The Lady of the house was named Ceridwen. This could mean 'fair and beloved', it could also mean 'crooked woman'. She was a sorceress wise in the spells of the elder days. Her husband was called Tegid Foel, Tegid the Bald, and between them they had two children. Their

266 Visions of Taliesin

daughter was a happy child. Her name was Creirwy, 'the Dear One', and everyone loved her for her friendly nature. Their son was the very opposite in looks and behaviour. He was named Morfran, 'Great Crow', as his voice resembled a screech. His face was dark and hairy and when people came to recognise his lack of wits, they called him Afagddu, 'Utter Darkness'. As the children grew, the Lady Ceridwen was beset by worries. What would become of the children when they grew up? Creirwy, bright of appearance, radiant with life, would have an easy path for she could bend the desires of men as she willed. But what would happen to the ugly one, to Afagddu, crouching in the twilight, muttering madly to himself?

The Lady Ceridwen thought long and deep. She searched for signs, spoke with the spirits and consulted the books of the Fferyllt. The answer was there, as it was whispered in the leaves of the trees and written across the starlit sky. She resolved to brew a cauldron of inspiration and wisdom, a cauldron of spells and sorceries to enlighten her darkside child.

Ninefold are the essences that join within the cauldron, and nine times nine the rites that work the binding. All the magick of the year is collected in the cauldron, and a year and a day it is the time it requires to brew. To prepare for the rite, Ceridwen chose an isolated hut far from the homes of mortals, and there she set up her biggest cauldron. New worries troubled her. Who would tend the fire and stir the broth while she was out gathering rare ingredients in secret places? A lucky twist of fate brought the help she needed. Two travellers on the dusty road, an old blind man called Morda, led by a young man of bright looks and quick wits named Gwion Bach, 'Gwion = fair, Bach = small'. Two hungry mouths roving the midsummer roads, glad of a little hospitality.

With a friendly smile, Lady Ceridwen made an offer to the youth. Would he care for a roof over his head, a bed of soft reeds and as much food as he liked? Young Gwion was delighted. Keeping a fire and stirring the broth, even if for a year and a day, seemed an easier life than leading a blind old man on an aimless journey, begging for food and shelter and often doing without. Eagerly offered and eagerly accepted,

Gwion made his home at the fireside, near the monstrous cauldron that squatted in the gloom like a hungry iron beast.

Soon a merry fire was dancing in the hearth, and while old Morda stretched out to do some serious sleeping, and Afagddu was playing in the ashes, Lady Ceridwen set out to gather all the wisdom in the world. Day after day, and night after night, Gwion kept the fire burning. Week after week, Lady Ceridwen travelled the country, gathering roots and blossoms, returning to her cauldron to cast her treasures into the seething fluid.

And the great wheel of the year revolved, season following upon season. Soon the rich green of Summer had given way to the auburn fire of Autumn - mists came, rain followed, and early snowfall cloaked the land with frozen beauty. Lady Ceridwen collected different items now, small birds and beasts she found dead in the snow, and like everything else, they went into the ever-hungry vessel.

The dark season came and endured. Snow storms howled around the hut. Old Morda had long since become fat and feeble-minded, and Gwion, the guardian of the cauldron fire, found himself all alone with Afagddu. Who knows the thoughts that rise in darkness? Black the hand that stirs the cauldron, black the face within the gloom, dark the mind that dwells in the twilight... Was it Gwion or Afagddu who was dreaming at the fireside?

Long lasted the season of the winter frosts, 'til the winds of Spring brought howling storm-gales to the sleeping forest. Trees were felled, proud giants toppled to the frozen soil, and gentle rain began to thaw the brittle ground. Spring came, and with it fresh leaves of bright green, cascading from birch and elder, to sing the song of Life's return to the newly wakening land. Still young Gwion, encrusted with soot and drunk on twilight, kept the fire alight, and the broth a-boiling.

Cuckoos called and oxen went into the furrow. The land was bright and colourful and people rejoiced with Maytime thoughts. Then summer came, and with it warmth and longer days. The heat of Lugh lay heavy upon the fields and orchards and the grains turned from gentle green to glowing gold. Still the Lady Ceridwen was collecting secret

268 Visions of Taliesin

ingredients, still young Gwion was bound to the cauldron, feeding the fire, stirring the broth, as if their lives depended on it. At harvest time the year came to its end.

Lady Ceridwen was out searching for the last time and Gwion was crouching in the ashes of the hearth, dozing fitfully. All of a sudden the broth overflowed, the foaming fluids frothed and hissed, and three drops of baneful elixir came flying out - three drops that burned the thumb of Gwion and woke him from his slumber. With a yell, Gwion put his scalded thumb in his mouth, and as the drops touched his tongue a flood of insight, all new, all wild and all chaotic, overwhelmed his mind and shattered his senses. All the wisdom, all the understanding, all the knowledge in the whole wide world!

Stunned by the wealth of visions, Gwion fell down, the ladle slipping from his grasp. The earth shook and with an ear-piercing scream the cauldron burst apart. Floods of bilious elixir came rushing, flooding the hearth, extinguishing the fire and boiling their way out of the door. Ah, Gwion - so wise and so confused! Prisoner of visions, taught in a speech that had no words! The *Awen* consumed him. Dream upon dream whirled through his mind, bearing his spirit on wings of voidness through the endless spirals of time.

A goatish laugh brought him to his senses. The hut was dark, the fireside sodden, the cauldron broken. Afagddu was drawing twisted lines in the damp ashes, giggling madly to himself. And Gwion remembered. The draught of wisdom; the Lady Ceridwen, who would soon return - to a ruined cauldron, to her precious draught that had passed sideways to the wrong drinker.

In an instant Gwion was on his feet, staggering through the door and into the blinding daylight beyond. Before him stretched fields and orchards, all strangely transformed. What made the grass so green, the sky so blue and clear? What made each flower so unique? A yell of wrath brought him to his wits. Not so far away he could see the sorceress running, with hatred in her eyes and death in her hands. And Gwion ran, collapsing forward, into the dust, and fast along the winding path. Feet turning brown and furry, ears extending, through shrubs and hedges he

took headlong flight. Loud barks came from behind. The hare turned to see her coming, shape-changed, as a huge grey hound with gaping jaws and yellow teeth. Gwion ran as fast as he could. Through meadows and along the hedgerows, over sun-parched fields and through shady woodland glades, always pursued by the fury of the hound. Where to run and where to hide? Lungs bursting, heart pounding madly, Gwion rushed through brambles and nettles and found himself on a river bank. Down the slope he tumbled, and into the crystal waters. A splash, then silence. Cold it was there, and quiet. Little bubbles rising to the surface, and beyond them, the shadow of a hound against the sky. And Gwion swam. The current carried him gently through rushes and water-lilies and around the bend of the river. Gwion of changed appearance! His fins hardly moving, the rainbow beauty of his scales concealed by the play of light and shade. As in the world above, so in the depths below.

There are dwellers in the stream, and creatures that lurk in darkness. A passing frog leaving a trail of bubbles, and armoured crab scuttling into the gloom. Cold silence all around, and Gwion moving freely, his trout shaped flesh finding an easy way through reeds and roots. Suddenly, with a silent explosion, the waters ruptured and razor-sharp teeth flashed at the trout. Gwion fled, twisting sideways, and up, his flanks gashed by the otter's bite, dashing through a bubbling trail of his own cold blood, closely pursued by the fur-clad marauder. With a desperate leap he hurled his torn body out of the water, unfurling his wings to seize the air in panic flight.

Imagine a lark rising on the balmy summer air. See it hovering high above the stream. Down below, an otter is peering out of the water. It scrambles up the river bank and disappears into the sedges. Imagine the lark, high above the sun-drenched land. The fields are bright with myriad colours and people are gathering in the harvest. Ever upwards is the path of Gwion as he soars on warm wind currents. A shadow falls across the sun - with a shriek the lark veers sideways, not a moment too soon, as out of the sun bursts a hawk with eyes of fire and talons of steel. Gwion sees again the eyes he knows too well. The first blow rakes his wing feathers - the second draws blood. Then Gwion falls from the air,

270 Visions of Taliesin

spinning in senseless flight, dropping fast, transforming as he goes, shrinking and shrinking. The earth below is rushing up to meet him; see the fields as they grow, see the farmyards and the barns, see the golden harvest as it is bound and gathered. His size dwindling, Gwion falls and drops into a heap of wheat. One grain amongst many, very small, very silent and very much afraid. Once more the shadow falls upon him. A black hen is towering over the wheat, her double comb all fiery red and pulsing, her eyes as cold as winter night. With one sharp motion the reaper devours Gwion. The seed passes into the darkness while Lady Ceridwen sheds wings and feathers and, cackling with laughter, returns to human size.

What happened to Gwion in the witch's womb? Only a few moments later Ceridwen sensed that her foe was still alive; not only that, but growing like a babe within her belly. On may-eve she gave birth to a child of beautiful appearance. A charming child and a wise one, with eyes that looked into the very essence of Ceridwen. Much as she wanted to, she could not bring herself to kill the babe.

'There are no secrets among us..' she muttered as she bound the babe within a leather bag and carried it to the sea shore. Without another word she hurled the bag and its occupant into the swirling waters, and the ninth wave came to carry them away. Far beyond the shore where the sun gleams brightly and gulls are circling with hungry cries, the bag sank into the deep.

Who knows the hidden currents far below the surface? Who knows where the waters of the salty sea turn into the colder waters of empty space? It is said that the journey of the babe took forty years. One fresh and radiant Spring morning the brine-soaked bag came to the surface again. Dancing on the foam-flecked waves it floated into an estuary where it was caught by the stakes of a weir. This weir was the famous hamper of Gwyddno Garanhir, a treasure of Britain, which had the magical virtue that no matter how many fed from it, the hamper would always refill itself. Every May morning the weir filled with strong, fat salmon which were easily taken with net and spear. What a surprise for Prince Elphin, the son of Gwyddno Garanhir, to find the weir entirely

empty of salmon! Nothing but a rotten leather bag dangling from a pole! Cursing his ill luck, Elphin rode into the water and freed the bag from its hold. Carefully he inserted his dagger and opened the salt-encrusted leather thong. What should he find inside but a baby, all fresh from the sea and yet so aged in appearance? ⁶ 'What a bright brow (tal-iesin),' he muttered to himself and to his amazement the babe replied, 'Taliesin it is!' and chanted its first song, which is known as 'The Consolation of Elphin.'

The above is my retelling of the legend of Taliesin's initiation, put together with the help of Gavin Semple. It is based on the *Hanes Taliesin* of Lady Guest which she compiled from several fragmentary versions, the oldest of which may go back to Llewelyn Sion (1540- c. 1615). Another version of the tale was recorded by Lewis Morris, c. 1726, which shows some variation. In Mr Morris' tale, the cauldron-enlightened lad has the name Taliesin from the start. The cauldron is a pan in which two gwiddans (enchantresses) are brewing a fluid of enlightenment which they mean to feed their sons. Young Taliesin appears as a hungry beggar. He shows the two sorceresses a novel way of cooking (by binding the fuel into faggots) and uses the opportunity to steal the three drops that transform the world. The gwiddans are not amused, put him into a bag and cast him into the sea.

The entire chase and transformation sequence is missing in this account. There exist, however, several songs by Taliesin which elaborate the chase by the hungry hag. In these, Taliesin assumes a wide variety of shapes to escape his initiatrix, such as crow, roe deer, wild boar, frog, wolf, fox, squirrel, raven, plus a number of inanimate objects such as an iron in a fire, the stump of a tree in a shovel, a boat on the sea, and the string of a child's swaddling clout. The list is long and no doubt the bards which sang it were capable of extending it at their whim (see Matthews, 1991). Now the legend of the draught of illumination is not confined to Welsh mythology. A striking parallel comes from Ireland. Here we have the tale of the great hero Finn (or Fionn) who met an ancient seer of the same name. Finn the seer had been living for many

272 Visions of Taliesin

years at a pool near the river Boyne, waiting for a chance to catch one of the famed salmon of wisdom. A prophecy had foretold that one Finn would eat the salmon, and Finn the seer was more than convinced that he was the chosen one. Young Finn (who was travelling under another name) helped the old seer Finn to catch the sacred fish. Then old Finn, who was quite exhausted by the chase, asked young Finn to cook the salmon for him, and went to sleep. By coincidence, young Finn burned his thumb, and as he put it into his mouth, all the wisdom of the great deep flooded his mind. From that moment, young Finn (a name which is closely related to that of Gwion) could become visionary whenever he chose to by the simple act of putting his thumb into his mouth (see Squire, 1905).

In some Irish legends, Finn not only puts his thumb in his mouth, he also chews it (hopefully not too hard). Chewing the thumb to evoke vision comes close to a bardic form of divination called '*imbas forosnai*', which involved chewing the raw flesh of a pig, dog or cat. These three beasts, as I'm sure you noticed, are all closely associated with the under- or otherworlds, and have a somewhat sinister character in Celtic mythology. 'Imbas forosnai' was one of the forms of divination that the Irish Fili mastered during their training. In the Irish epic, the *Tain bo Cuailnge* we encounter Lady Fedelm, a poet from Connacht, who had learned 'verse and vision' in Alba (Scotland). As she is expert in imbas forosnai, Queen Medb asks her to prophecy what would become of her army. Fedelm sees, and declares 'I see crimson, I see red!' Of course, Queen Medb refuses to believe this, throws one of her famous fits, and orders Fedelm to look again. Four times Fedelm prophecies crimson and red, then extends her description, and sings of Cu Chulainn, with his hero's halo, the seven hard heroic jewels in his eyes, his warped fighting spasm, how he single-handedly destroys the hosts of Queen Medb. Indeed, Cu Chulainn used to shake and tremble when the 'fighting spasm' came over him, which involved twisting around within body, glowing like a Christmas tree and having a black fountain shoot out of his head. This turned out to be a remarkably accurate prophecy, but of course Queen Medb didn't learn from it.

What we know about the actual practice of *imbas forosnai* comes from the glossary of Cormac MacCuilennian, an etymological dictionary explaining old and obscure words. Cormac was bishop of southern Ireland and King of Munster. According to him, *imbas forosnai* could be used to discover whatever a poet wants to learn about. The actual rite, as he described it, seems to have consisted of two parts. First, the poet chews a bit of raw meat, as mentioned above, offers it to his 'idol gods', and places it on a flagstone behind the door. In the next part of the rite, the 'idol gods' are requested to provide insight. For this purpose, the poet chants over his two palms. Then the palms are placed on the cheeks and the poet 'goes to sleep' in this posture. Cormac mentions that the poet had to be prevented from turning over, and undisturbed. After a fixed time (would you believe *days*?) the new knowledge is revealed. St. Patrick put a stop to practices of this kind, supposedly as they involved a sacrifice to the pagan deities. As you have probably noticed, this account is somewhat fragmentary. Indeed, as B. Maier (1994) points out, it seems doubtful that Cormac, who ruled from 902 to 908, could give an accurate description of a practice that was outlawed by St. Patrick in the 5th century.

What the words '*imbas forosnai*' mean is a difficult question. 'Imbas' has been translated as 'enlightenment', which could make it a similar word to old Welsh '*awen*', the spirit of ecstatic inspiration. Cormac claims that the word comes from the palms of the hands (*bas*) which are placed on (*im*) the cheeks, but then his etymology is often a bit shaky. J. Matthews (1991), who treats the matter very fully, quotes alternative translations, such as 'illumination between the hands' (Dunn) and 'that which closes the eyes but also illuminates' (Loth). Th. Kinsella (1969) offers 'the light of foresight'.

Would you like to give this form of divination a try? You could start out by invoking your gods and spirits to reveal some hidden matter to you. For this purpose, I suggest you do not enquire about the fate of armies but about some topic that really interests you, such as 'I would like to learn about *imbas forosnai*'. Then you could proceed to offer a gift to your allies. It does not have to be raw meat (though (he

274 Visions of Taliesin

symbolism is certainly interesting). Affection, strong emotion and a dosis of bio-energy (by rubbing the palms and offering, for instance) are quite as efficient. After this, I recommend that you sit down, with your back against a wall for support, and rest your elbows on your knees. Try to be moderately comfortable. You could also try this posture lying on your side - find out what you like. Hold your hands in front of your face, ask your question into your palms and request that the answer - the vision - may come out of them. When you've made contact (allow your deep mind to give you a signal) allow your cheeks to rest on the palms, the fingers loosely covering the eyes, so that some light comes through the gaps between them. In this sense the head, the 'cauldron of knowledge' rests on the supporting hands while the fingers seem to form a twilight grove of trees.

You may notice that this posture has a remarkable quality of 'in-betweenness'. It keeps your body between tension and relaxation, loose enough to facilitate dream and vision, and yet requiring a measure of attention and maintenance, so you won't fall asleep. Likewise, your closed eyes will receive light as well as darkness from the fingers, as they loom like ancient trees in a nemeton of shadows. The play of light and dark, again, is between waking (bright) and sleeping (dark), in a consciousness that is both and neither. The pressure of the hands, and the warmth of the face, seem to dissociate from the outside world by creating a sacred space. It seems an interesting question why we should use such a posture, when we could equally seek answers to our questions in some conventional meditation asana. One great advantage of the posture lies in the gesture of asking into the palms. This 'anchors' (associates) your question to the palms, which you can feel on your face, so you may find it easier to keep the question in mind. As you have clearly asked what you want to know, your deep mind knows clearly what information it should provide. Likewise, your conscious mind will find it easy to stick to the topic as the visions come through. This can prevent day-dreaming, or drifting off, a common phenomenon when visions are sought. You may also notice that, as you 'see' into your hands, you are actually seeing into your self. Thus, after the vision, you

would do well to give your thanks to spirits, gods and sell alike.

A Scottish parallel of the Taliesin tale, *Fearachur Leigh* was recorded by Sutherland, and published by Campbell. Fearachur was a simple herdsman. One day, when he was selling cattle in England, a learned doctor approached him: 'What are you holding in your hand?'

'It's a wand of hazel, your lordship. "Will you get me a similar one from the same bush?' asked the doctor. 'You will receive good gold, more than you can carry, and by the way, take this bottle with you. There must be a hole in the earth below the hazel. When you cut the wand, six serpents will emerge, and you will let them pass. When the seventh appears, catch it in the bottle and I will double your pay.' 'I will gladly do as you ask' replied Fearachur. Back in Glen Gollig, he did as he was instructed, and indeed six brown adders came creeping from the hole beneath the hazel roots. The seventh was pure white and the king of all serpents. Fearachur duly caught it in the bottle, and brought the wand and the serpent king to the doctor in England. 'You will soon be paid' said the doctor 'but first you will help me cook this serpent.' So the two built a fire of hazel wood, placed the serpent in a pot and sealed the lid with paper, so that no steam might escape. Then the doctor left on some errand, and Fearachur guarded the pot. Before long, the broth began to boil, and inevitably, Fearachur burned his fingers as he tried to keep the lid shut. As he put them into his mouth 'the eyes of his spirit' were opened and our herdsman became the wisest seer and doctor in the world.

The element of hazel in our tale is no coincidence. It should perhaps be noted that the salmon of wisdom, who is one of the oldest beasts on earth, obtained his wisdom by eating the famed hazelnuts of wisdom. According to the *Dindsenchas* there is the well of Connla under the sea. 'A well under the sea' may seem somewhat paradoxical, but let me assure you that there is meaning to the metaphor. At the source of that well grows a sacred hazel with the virtue that its leaves, blossoms and nuts all appear in the same hour (like the flowering fern, see Chapter 1). When they fall, the waters of the well rise and turn to purple, a colour often attributed to the inbetween realm of the abyss.

276 Visions of Taliesin

From this undersea well, seven streams of wisdom flow and turn back again. The salmons of wisdom travel on these streams when they come to feed on the nuts. These seven streams may correspond to the seven senses listed by Taliesin in his 'song of the macrocosmos', that is, the senses of instinct, feeling, speaking, tasting, seeing, hearing and smelling (according to Matthews, 1991). These senses are seven streams of awareness which flow into the waking world (the world we perceive around us) and into the dream world (the internal world of thought, dream, imagination). As I wrote in *Visual Magick*, our experience of the outer- and inner world tends to assume the forms of sensual representation. The outer senses represent the outer world, the same senses turned inward represent the inner world.

As you may recall, the 'serpent's egg', as Pliny was told, has the unique virtue of floating upstream on a river. It is by floating upstream those rivers of the senses, by reversing the flow and returning to its origin, that the phenomenal universe (waking and dreaming) dissolves and the pre-conceptual 'reality' (the source of the rivers) can be experienced. In this realm abides the self, the truth, which creates, experiences and destroys all phenomena, all forms, all thoughts and things - a 'self that has no form, is no thing and cannot be comprehended within the limits of dualistic thought.

Now it would be easy to assume that our tale is a Celtic one. I suspect that it is of even older Indo-European ancestry, as alternative versions occur in other countries. There is even a Chinese version of it, describing how one of the eight immortals of Taoism obtained enlightenment. The most impressive sample occurs in the tale of Sigurd the dragon-slayer, as it was recorded in the Icelandic *Edda*. Now the dragon of the myth, Fafner, is not quite a dragon but a mortal, or giant, who had become a dragon through a process of transformation. Fafner had slaughtered his own father, stolen the greatest gold treasure in Germanic mythology, and retired with all the wealth to the lone desolation of the Gnita-heath. There he wore the 'Ogishelm', the helmet of horror, until he had become a great worm, or dragon. Fafner had a brother, the cunning smith Regin, and Regin was keen on the gold,

which Fafner had refused to share with him. It was Regin who re-forged the shattered blade of the divine sword, and gave it to young Sigurd with the injunction to go out, slay the dragon and collect the hoard. The young Sigurd of the Sagas is a rather naive figure who has grown up, as an orphan, in the wild woods. He trusts in Regin, as he trusts his blade, and had not Odin appeared to teach him dragon-slaying, old Fafner would have devoured him in two bites. Thus, Sigurd dug a hole under Fafner's path and stabbed the worm from below. After a gory battle, Sigurd slew the dragon. Regin appeared out of some bushes where he had been hiding, approached his dead brother, drank of his blood, cut out the heart and gave it to Sigurd, who was to cook it. Well, while Regin was sleeping and Sigurd was turning the heart above the fire, guess what happened. Wyrd has Sigurd burn his thumb, and as soon as he licks it, his mind is enlightened so he understands the language of the birds. Seven eagle ladies are sitting high above him in a tree.

There sits Sigurd, spotted with blood
 And heats in the fire Fafner's heart.
 Wise I would deem the destroyer of rings
 If he would eat the glowing flesh of life.
 There lies Regin who makes up his mind
 How to betray the man who trusts him
 His evil is focused on false accusation
 The smith of badness plots revenge for his brother.

(Fafnismal, 32, 33)

Now Sigurd is a bit surprised to hear this, but anyway, he gets up, slays Regin, loads his horse with gold and rides off into cloud-cuckoo land in a dreamlike haze. There he finds Sigdrifa, the Valkyrie, sleeping in a ring of fire on a mountain top. She awakes from her trance, completes his initiation by revealing a wealth of runic wisdom (see the *Sigrdrifumal*) and then the two marry, and swear vows of loyalty to each other. It seems likely that Sigurd, just like Gwion after the imbibition of the elixir, functions in a visionary state.

Significantly, Sigurd has lapses of memory when he leaves the

278 Visions of Taliesin

mountain top and joins the 'Realpolitik' of the nobles of Burgund. Cases of lost memory are a common theme in Celtic and Germanic mythology. Finn and Sigurd have in common that they are both celebrated as great dragon slayers. Dr Anne Ross (1967) gives a long list of dragons and serpents which were killed by Finn - two monsters, one giant, two great reptiles, eighteen serpents, seven phantoms, one spectre, and one monster-cat are mentioned, but 'there was not a reptile in Ireland's glens but he took by the force of his blows'. Apparently the persecution of serpents and dragons began long before St. Patrick banished them from Ireland. What is common to the tales of Gwion, Taliesin, Finn, Fearachur and Sigurd? First of all that the hero receives enlightenment which is not intended for him but for another person. This may be due to fate, chance or theft. Then there is the form which symbolises the elixir of enlightenment. The sacred wisdom is a fluid. It comes from a cauldron (the grail), which can also be represented by a pot or pan, from the serpent king, from a silent salmon or from a giant who has become a dragon. Compare the Taliesin tale to the account of how Odin stole the poet's mead. I suspect that these stories grew out of a common root, and that this root is ancient indeed. These ideas have the same function. As was mentioned in the chapter fifteen, dragons, serpents, cauldrons and other vessels often come in company with each other.

Another interesting issue is the relationship between Gwion, Afagddu and Taliesin. I suspect that at some time, the three figures formed a trinity describing, maybe, the archetypal bard or seer. To illustrate this assumption, let me begin by pointing out that Gwion, in our story, is but a simple human being who transforms through a series of initiations by ordeal into the enlightened seer Taliesin. Taliesin, however, as is so evident from the songs and poems, is not quite a human being but a sentience that was present at all events of history, that has appeared and lived in a myriad of forms and will continue to transform till after the end of the world. Between 'Gwion of little merit' and Taliesin lies the process of enlightenment.

It is an interesting detail that the drink of inspiration is brewed for

Afagddu ('over-dark'), but that in the process of initiation, it is Gwion who experiences darkness in three ordeals. The first darkness is the twilight near the cauldron, the play of the dancing flames with coils of smoke and flickering shadows. It takes a bright light to throw a dark shadow, and the closer one approaches it the darker appears the rest of the world. The next phase of darkness was more intense: nine long months the all-knowing seed ripened in the black womb of Lady Ceridwen. The third darkness was deeper still; it was the darkness of the great ocean, the abyss of water which surrounds the known earth, and the greater ocean of stellar space around it. The draught from the cauldron was just the beginning of the rite. It was in total darkness that the nameless babe ripened to spiritual maturity and realised a self that lies beyond form and absence. 'Afagddu' signifies this, the self beyond the phenomenal world. Austin Spare called it 'neither-neither', and Hadit, in *Al Vel Legis* II, 15, expresses the same notion: 'For I am perfect, being not...' The babe in the bag is not. As soon as Prince Elphin opened the bag and named the babe, young Taliesin began to sing, to praise the wonder of the world with 'the eloquence of the wave'. Out of the dark, into the light, a bard is born and a song is formed. It seems - and this is supported by other episodes in the *Hanes Taliesin* - that the seer finds inspiration in the dark, which manifests in sweet words as soon as he comes to light again.

There are some indications that certain bardic schools made use of darkness to train their apprentices. One of the main elements of bardic training was the knowledge of songs and tales, as well as laws, customs, the meaning of odd words, symbolic attributions to the various ogham alphabets and grammar. Much of the knowledge of the Celts was preserved in the shape of songs. Many of these described genealogies, historical incidents, codes of ethics and the lore of the country, i.e. the legends attributed to each hill, forest, river, town and so on. Bardic training required seven, some say twelve years or more. In this time, hundreds of poems, songs and tales were memorised, which made each bard a walking library, a custodian of the accumulated knowledge of his culture. J. Matthews gives an excellent account of the bardic methods

280 Visions of Taliesin

of training, some of which involved the use of darkness. In the *Memories of the Marquis of Clanricarde*, c. 1722, a functioning Irish Academy of Bards is described. It was situated in a long hut, far from the dwellings of men, in a place that was especially silent. The hut was divided into small apartments, each of which housed an apprentice. These cells had no windows. For illumination, candles were used, but only in those special hours when the master bard came into the building to teach. At all other times, the apprentices dwelled in absolute darkness, memorising songs, poems, tales and proverbs, and having all sorts of wild visions due to sensual withdrawal. It seems likely that those budding bards did not just memorise their material, they probably experienced it in wonderfully lucid visions.

A very similar method was used by Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit Order, in the training of Jesuits. These had to spend long hours visualising events from the Bible, first building up the scenery, then watching the events, and later stepping into the vision to experience it directly. Quite a few Jesuits have hallucinated what it means to die as Christ on the cross, and when these people preached, they knew from personal experience what they were talking about.

You can make use of this method should you like to learn the art of story telling. For a start, think of some stories you could tell. You need two basic items. One of them is a story. What stories can you tell really well? Usually it is a story that really touches you, a story that raises emotions and vivid experience. If your story lacks the element of 'vivid experience', you can make it up by experiencing the story material vividly. The second item is a structure, an organising layout which allows you to tell the story step by step, in the right order, with as few disruptions, explanations and meta-comments as possible. The easiest way to organise your story is to imagine you are seeing it happen, as if it were a dream or movie. Try it with the tale of Taliesin. Go into a gentle trance state if you like. Close your eyes, calm down, relax and begin to build up the scenery. It does not matter if you have ever been to Wales. Make it a fantastic scene, one that really has an atmosphere. Next, imagine the characters, and then watch the tale as it happens. As you

visualise the story, you will notice which parts are already organised, and where bits are missing. Imagine the story several times. If you like, you can accompany your imagination by words, and tell the tale to yourself. If you do this often enough, the words and the pictures will amplify each other. With each repetition you may find your story becoming more vivid and elaborate.

For the emotional element, I suggest you step into your imagination and experience the story as if you were one of its characters. What is it like to be Gwion? What is it like to be Ceridwen, or Afagddu? A myth can be viewed from many points of view, and each of them produces a different story. *The more points of view you experience (and this goes for all reality, not just for story telling) the better will you understand the whole.* If you really want to understand a story, experience it in each of its characters. Darkness was not only used to train the bards. It was also re-embraced when bards sought inspiration, as was described by Martin (quoted by Matthews):

They shut their doors and windows for a day's time, and lie on their backs with a stone upon their belly, and plaids about their heads...

From this lonely cell, from darkness and over-darkness, resting on rock and under rock, as if they were already buried, the bards received their visions. Darkness for the eyes, silence for the ears and resting to numb the sense of feeling. Now 'darkness', 'silence' and 'resting' are only approximations, are glyphs that hide behind their form an access to the self. We can use them as keys to the self, or as gates to its experience, if we realise that the self lies *beyond* them. There have been numerous sages who taught that, for instance, silence is holier than words. What they meant was not 'silence' in the everyday sense (absence of words or sounds) but a quality of experience that precedes the illusion of silence and its counterpart, the illusion of speech. In the same sense, the 'absence' that symbolises self in some philosophies is not just an absence of presence, but also an absence of absence. The darkness of Afagddu has nothing to do with light or its absence, as it is older than either of them.

282 Visions of Taliesin

It seems likely that the 'Awen', the creative spirit, refers to a state of enlightenment. The bards of Britain were not only keepers of the knowledge of the past, they were also trained to improvise new songs and to prophecy events of the future. If we can trust St. Gildas, the Welsh bards foamed from the mouth while they prophesied, which may indicate that Celtic prophecy was an ecstatic, not a dignified, activity. It would not surprise me if they also trembled or shuddered in the process. So, if any reader knows of data confirming this point, I would love to hear it. Gerald of Wales, in his *Description of Wales* (c. 1188) offers an entire chapter on prophecy, which he entitled:

Welsh soothsayers, who behave as if they are possessed.

Among the Welsh there are certain individuals called 'awenyddion' who behave as if they are possessed by devils. (...) When you consult them about some problem, they immediately go into a trance and lose control of their senses, as if they are possessed. They do not answer the question put to them in any logical way. Words stream from their mouths, incoherently and apparently meaningless and without any sense at all, but all the same well expressed: and if you listen carefully to what they say you will receive the solution to your problem. When it is over, they will recover from their trance (...) but you have to give them a good shake before they regain control of themselves. There are two odd things about all this: when they have given their answer, they do not recover from their paroxysm unless they are shaken violently and forced to come round again; and when they do return to their senses they can remember nothing of what they have said in the interval. If by chance they are questioned a second or a third time on the same matter, they give completely different answers. (Trans. Lewis Thorpe, 1978)

It seems that Gerald, though he was an ambitious church-man, felt a certain sympathy for these prophets. Much of the rest of the chapter consists of rationalisations and excuses, plus any amount of prophetic examples from the *Bible*. What he finds odd I find rather natural - if you

would shake me while I recovered from a trance, chances are good that I'd become forgetful too. On the other hand, there are quite a few cultures where prophets pretend a loss of memory after the trance, no matter whether they remember or not. This has the great advantage that their customers cannot pester them with further questions or, worse yet, pleas to explain the prophecy. A true prophecy cannot be explained; it is meant to make sense to the person for whom it is uttered. Welsh history contains accounts of several saints and/or lunatics who had the gift of ranting and raving prophecy. No doubt the historical Myrddin ('Merlin') who was mad for much of his life, is a lucid example. Gerald says of Merlin that 'there is no mention of his sanctity or devoutness', 'we do not read that he was saintly or that he performed miracles' and adds ... 'that when Merlin Silvester made his prophecies he was in a frenzy.' Nevertheless, Gerald was so impressed with Merlin's prophecies that he wrote a book about them which has not survived. The whole issue of ecstatic prophecy can be summed up in the words of Mark Twain:

'When the spirit of prophecy comes upon you,
 You merely take your intellect
 And lay it off in a cool place for a rest,
 And unship your jaw and leave it alone;
 It will work itself: the result is prophecy.'

(*A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, 1889)

For a vivid account of Myrddin, Lailoken and Suibhne Geilt, all of them famous for their mad prophecies, consult Count Tolstoy's excellent *The Quest for Merlin* (1985).

Identity is a key to the Taliesin myth. Taliesin transformed to flee Lady Ceridwen, but when he later came to chant of his nature, there seems no end to the beings he has been. Here are some of the shapes, as listed in the poem *The Hostile Confederacy*, translation Nash.

A second time in transformation,
 I have been a blue salmon,
 I have been a dog, I have been a stag,
 I have been a roebuck in the mountain,



I have been a stump of a tree in a shovel,
 I have been an axe in the hand,
 I have been the pin of a pair of tongs
 A year and a half...

Other songs by Taliesin elaborate this theme.

And by law without speech I was set at liberty.
 The old hag, black her appearance when irritated;
 Dreadful were her screams when pursuing me.
 I fled with vigour, I fled as a frog;
 I fled in the semblance of a raven, scarcely finding rest;
 I fled vehemently, I fled as a chain;
 I fled as a roe into an entangled thicket;
 I fled as a wolf cub, I fled as a wolf in a wilderness;
 I fled as a thrush, the interpreter of omens;
 I fled as a fox, leaping and turning;
 I fled as a marten, which did not avail;
 I fled as a squirrel, that vainly hides;
 I fled as an antlered stag of free course;
 I fled as iron in a glowing fire;
 I fled as a spear-head, woe to him who desires it;
 I fled as a bull fierce in fighting;
 I fled as a bristly boar seen in a ravine;
 I fled as a white grain of pure wheat,...

(From the *History of Taliesin*, translated by Nash.)

Who is this self that enjoys so many different forms? Indeed the poet may chant 'I have been in many shapes before I attained a congenial form' and add *there is nothing in which I have not been*. These simple words seem like a description when they in fact contain, and suggest, a formula of self-discovery.

I have been a sow, I have been a buck,
 I have been a sage, I have been a snout,
 I have been a horn, I have been a wild sow,
 I have been a shout in battle.
 I have been a torrent on the slope,

286 Visions of Taliesin

I have been a wave on the extended shore.
I have been a light sprinkling of a deluge,
I have been a cat with a speckled head on three trees.
I have been a circumference, I have been a head.
A goat on an elder-tree.
I have been a crane well-filled, a sight to behold...

(*Book of Taliesin* XXV, translation Skene.)

It would be easy to interpret such catalogues of 'I have been' as samples of megalomania if it were not for the fact that a good many shapes the poet has experienced are of a somewhat humble nature. Not all beasts which Taliesin has been are of the 'classic totem beast' variety and not all of the objects are a reason for ego to bloat itself with pride. Some scholars have seen the 'I have been' poetry of Taliesin as evidence for the long-sought-for Celtic theory of reincarnation. Pythagoras taught a form of reincarnation based on the idea that everything reincarnates as everything else, but it is highly doubtful if the Celtic people adhered to such beliefs. Celtic mythology abounds with otherworld 'paradises' where heroes dwell after death, and only occasionally does one of them return, in human shape, to perform some specific task. There are plenty of stories describing how humans transformed into beasts, but few of them indicate 'reincarnation'. What Taliesin describes in his 'I have been' songs is not a 'one life after another' scenario but a broadening of the mind, an expansion of consciousness. Taliesin experiences literally everything as himself. All objects, all thoughts and all phenomena are Taliesin as soon as he becomes conscious of them. Indeed, Taliesin is able to recognise himself in all possible forms by virtue of not being any of them, but the consciousness itself, formless and paradoxical, which creates the world of appearances. 'I have been' or 'I am' realizations are a common element in mysticism and advanced shamanism. Many a shaman has chanted songs stating that s/he is this and that (see Joan Halifax, 1979). *The Songs of Maria Sabina* are an excellent example. But what makes such songs interesting is the point where you cease being this and that, and become *all* you experience, the totality of the play of conscious-

ness, in the world of appearances.

Now there are at least two ways of experiencing this consciousness. One of them is to induce the consciousness (by whatever means) followed by the song of *lam*... The other way consists of beginning with the song, as if it were a hypnotic induction or a magical invocation, which may eventually lead to the desired consciousness.

For a start, you could begin with the classical 'I have been' formula. It doesn't matter where you try the practice, so try it now. What are you aware of right now? If I would chant now, as I am writing these words, typical phrases would sound like this: I have been a pen, I have been a word, I have been a hand writing, I have been a fly walking across the page, and so on. Try this for a while. Next, extend your speech a little. You will notice that longer phrases, with more detail, make the experience more vivid. I have been a flake of dust, dancing in the sunshine. I have been the sound of a car, passing on the street. I have been a carpet, spread on the ground. I have been a swallow flying past a window...' Try to extend each phrase. You will soon notice how much detail you need to get going. The essential issue in this practice is that you identify that you have been whatever comes into your awareness. Try it at home, in the city, in the forest, wherever you may be. After you have gained some experience in this method, try to vary the time. What happens when you use the formula 'I am...' instead of 'I have been...', or the formula 'I will be...'?

People often use phrases in daily life in an unconscious way. People say 'I am tired', 'I am glad', 'I am exhausted', etc., as if 'tired', 'glad', 'exhausted' were names or roles they identify with. If you say 'I am worried' you take an activity, worrying, and make it a thing to identify with. It is a very convincing identification. Compare it with 'I feel worried', which implies that you sense (feel) 'worried' but you could also sense other things. If you 'feel exhausted', you still have the choice to feel, see or hear other sensations, but if you say 'I am exhausted', you are that, and it is all there is to you. Using the 'I am' formula in daily life can be highly restrictive, especially when one uses it to describe negative sensations. The danger of 'I am' is its effect in sloppy speech

288 Visions of Taliesin

and thought, that it seems so simple and convincing. Some people tell themselves 'I am sick' in such a convincing way that they become sick. If they formulate it as 'I feel sick' this leaves room for other sensations, and the option of change ('I felt sick, I feel better now'). Using the 'I am' formula with so-called positive ideas, as in 'positive thinking' can be quite as delusive. Lots of people tell themselves 'I am good', as if the act of naming themselves would automatically make them so. In practice, this common form of self-hypnosis only causes them to ignore all data that conflicts with 'goodness'. If you tell yourself something like 'I am a witch', this won't make you one, no matter how intensely you believe. Becoming a witch involves a lot of work. If you think that you are one already, chances are that you won't bother to learn, practice and work. A much more useful phrase would be 'I can learn to be a witch.' The same goes for other notions of identity. A fat person can use 'positive thinking' to produce the delusion 'I am slim', but nobody else is going to notice any change. Using the formula 'I can learn to be slim' is much more efficient, as it includes the prospect of change and development. In itself, the 'I am' formula constitutes a trap as long as it is used for a few ideas. If you extend it, however, going: 'I am this and I am that and that and that...' (and so on), the experience changes dramatically. The more you are the less will you be restricted by the conditions and nature of each thing on your list. If Taliesin were only two or three things he would be limited indeed. As he is everything he experiences, the range of his identities is ever expanding, until it passes the limits of what the mind can cope with. Another interesting trance induction found in numerous Taliesin songs is the 'riddle form'. Rambling along, the bard asks questions, one after the other, without pausing for an answer:

No one knows what makes the sun red-coloured
On his first rising;
In an hour it goes away.
Why a harp string is white
Why the salmon glitters,
What preserves it without fire; (...)

When the sea will be pleasant,
 When is the growth of the seed,
 Whence it grows up high,
 Or whence comes the sun?
 What is it agitates the wood,
 Or fashions the froth on the water?

(Trans. Nash)

It has been claimed that Taliesin asked such series of questions to show the ignorance of the 'fat-bellied bards' of Maelgwn's court. I propose the hypothesis that Taliesin himself did not know 'the answers' to these zen-like questions. Indeed, their value seems to lie in the fact that they cannot be answered in a reasonable way, which means that they can be used to transcend reason. When Taliesin asks 'why is thorn sharp?' or 'what is as salty as salt?' these questions are valuable as they produce many answers. When he sings 'why is the linnet green?' it gets more confusing yet, as linnets are not green but have a radiant red breast. When Taliesin sings 'are the bones of man made of vapour?' a reasonable answer is not expected. Indeed such questions come close to the koans, the 'impossible riddles' given to zen-pupils. R. Restak quotes Dr. Tomio Hirai who studied the brain waves of people meditating about such koans. Dr. Hirai found that the zen masters never accept an answer to a koan which was found in beta (waking) awareness. All acceptable answers had been found in a state of deep alpha, more commonly in theta (deep trance) awareness. Such answers are often as 'unreasonable' as the riddles which produced them. They are not nice or logical, but characterised by a genuine moment of insight or 'illumination'. It is an interesting detail that you can induce theta brain activity to find an answer, but that finding an answer (in the waking state) can immediately lead to theta brain wave activity, if the answer is 'right'.

Wherefore should a stone be hard;
 Why should a thorn be sharp-pointed;
 Who is hard like a flint;
 Who is salt like brine;

290 Visions of Taliesin

Who sweet as honey;
Who rides on the gale;
Why ridged should be the nose;
Why a wheel should be round;
Why should the tongue be gifted with speech
Rather than another member? ...

(Trans. Lady Guest)

In Taliesin's riddles we encounter questions which are typical for children, mystics and other people who have retained the art of marvelling at seemingly 'everyday objects'. There are millions of riddles around us, which reveal themselves as soon as we cease taking things for granted. As a lovely trance induction, go for a walk and ask yourself such questions. Why is this branch crooked? How do plants know which way to grow? Why is the bramble thorny and the broom yellow? How does light travel? Where goes the light when darkness comes? Don't bother to find an answer. Just keep asking, asking, asking ... this trance induction communicates in no uncertain terms that the world is full of marvels - you get a lovely 'trance of wonder'.

The bard comes out of the dark, to sing a song of joy and rapture, to eulogise the dream of life. After the song, s/he disappears into the dark again. The all-knowing brilliance of Taliesin balances with the voidness and dim wits of Afagddu, where Taliesin illuminates the world of phenomena, Afagaddu, unknowingly dissolves it. Indeed, being 'wise' or 'all-knowing' can only be bearable when it is alternated with being 'foolish', 'mad' and 'empty'. Both Taliesin and Afagddu require a body to function in this world, a mask to wear, a personality. Gwion, little Gwion is their earthing, the illusion of flesh and blood and identity, with all his hopes and hungers, the 'human self' who goes to work and cooks the food. The three depend on each other.

Beyond words is silence. Beyond silence is the 'silence' or 'voidness' of the pre-conceptual self. This self may seem absent, or non-existent, but it is totally conscious. Thus, it is consciousness that floats down the rivers of the senses and creates the world of forms and appearances. As it returns and floats up the rivers of the senses, it

dissolves the phenomenal world and returns to the source of its own origin. Seven streams seem to flow from the well under the sea, but where each of them begins or ends is impossible to say, as the water is everywhere. With a laugh, the author ceases to be 'well-informed', lays the pen aside and rejoices in not-knowing. As Taliesin framed it:

Brittle are the young shoots of the tree

Frail like them,

A little while and we melt away;

At the end of our toil

Languages shall pass away,

(trans. Nash)

Coins and the Taliesin Myth

The Celtic coins you see on the following pages have been selected as I believe that they illustrate aspects of the Taliesin myth. This is highly speculative, of course, and I would like to offer my comments on the understanding that many other interpretations are equally possible. The six coins were minted during the two centuries before Christ. For simplicity's sake, I have used a black and white representation of the ornaments. Keep in mind that these were coins, and polished with use. They gleamed in the light as people turned them around to examine the picture in the play of brightness and shadow.

Top left: This coin was probably minted by the Coriosolites who lived in Brittany. This very abstract image is a good example of the multiple interpretations that make Celtic art and mythology come to life. There are several 'faces' on this coin, which can be discovered by looking at the image from various sides and preferably in a state of deep inner silence. None of these faces is complete or solid. It is through their virtue of being so ambiguous that the many faces become possible. If this coin shows a human being, it is certainly a human in the process of disintegration and reformation. I suspect that the image shows a bard or druid obsessed by the spirit of inspiration, the 'Awen', as it shatters human awareness and shakes the seer with oracular frenzy - but in such matters, your guess is as good as anyone's.

Top right: This gold coin, 18mm, is attributed to the Bellovaker people, who were a major tribe of the Belgae. You will notice three large circles in the picture. Then there is a left hand, one of the circles sticks to the thumb. Could this be a representation of the three drops of toxic elixir which flew from the cauldron, burned the thumb and transformed the world? Note that the hand is between two stars. It comes from one and reaches for another. Taliesin's poems contain frequent references to 'stellar wisdom' and in one song, the bard reveals that his original country is 'the region of the summer stars'. The hand, however, is not only a hand but also a bird, image of the soul in flight. Some island-Celtic source texts, such as *The Colloquy of the Two Sages*



294 Visions of Taliesin

and *The Siege of Drom Damhgaire* (see Matthews, 1991 and O'Duinn 1992) show that some of the druids and ovates used to wear feather-cloaks as a sign of their rank, during ritual, and when they used their skills for shape-changed journeys in the spirit worlds.

Middle left: Gold coin, 23mm, attributed to the Turonen who lived near the middle of the Loire. Here we have another example of the importance of the thumb. Several items of Celtic art work show figures who exhibit their thumbs or put them into their mouths, just like Gwion, Finn and Sigurd did. We may consider the thumb as a sign and source of inspiration in Celtic/Germanic mythology. The figure on the coin seems to be a woman (or goddess) which is not very unusual, as there are quite a few Celtic coins showing women riding, or driving chariots. This one holds her right thumb up. Its position at the central top of the coin balances a curious entity at the bottom, between the legs of the horse. Another bizarre being can be seen on the right. These tentacloid creatures come close to the visions which a number of sensitives have received from what may be called 'the ancient ones'. Their function on a Celtic coin poses several questions. What are they doing there? It would be simple to claim that horse and rider are trampling the creatures beneath them. This, however, is probably not the case. Horses, riders and chariots are a popular theme on Celtic coins. These often show symbols, animals and abstract images between the legs of the horse. Looking through a couple of books, I have found the following items: several dead warriors, circles, two scorpions, grains, several cauldrons, wild boars, young horses, a tree (apple or yew - the fruit is very prominent), a monstrous fish, a beast with a wolfish head and a serpent's tail, snakes, a dog, plus several abstract shapes, such as wheels, circles, squares, 'lyre-shapes', a bag (?), flowers (?) and even a person lying on the ground, with thumb in mouth. This is enough material to fill a book. Complicated as it may seem, may I propose that at least some of these items were attributes of the horse/rider, or forces from which the horse/rider derived their power and divine function?

Middle right: This well known coin comes from Bavaria. It is usually attributed to the Boier people, for want of a better source.

Actually, the Boier people did not settle in Bavaria for long. Originally they came from Gaul. They crossed the Alps around 400 BC and settled in Italy (Bologna) until c. 200 BC when the Romans drove them north. Next, they lived in Bohemia. In the middle of the first century BC they split up, one part of the tribe moving to Hungaria, the other part moving across Bavaria to join the Helvetians. In due course, Julius Caesar crushed them. Such a history may be seen as an example for the complicated migrations practised by many Celtic and Germanic tribes. It may give you an idea how hard it is to attribute anything as free-flowing as cash to any given culture, and remind you how much of our present knowledge is based on educated guesswork and scholarly consensus.

The image on the coin has often been called a rainbow. Folk-lore in southern Germany bestowed the name 'rainbow-cups' to all sorts of Celtic coins, and claimed that gold coins can be found under rainbows - or at least, after a good rainfall, when the metal has been washed and shines in the rays of the sun. If we turn the rainbow around, as I have done in the illustration, we arrive at an image of a cauldron. Now rainbows, although beautiful, are not especially emphasised by Celtic mythology. Cauldrons, however, are among the most important religious symbols of the Celtic and Germanic cultures, and feature prominently in countless rites and legends. Though the image on this coin is rather simple it was certainly popular. Several Celtic coins show such a cauldron rainbow, including six circles or drops - three for the depth and three for the height.

Bottom left: Another of the bizarre faces. This one was found in the region of the lower Danube. The coin is gold, 15mm, and although it is definitely Celtic, scholars have been shy about attributing it to any specific tribe. Personally, I see this image as an excellent expression of Afagddu-consciousness. There is a dark and brooding atmosphere to the face. As with many coins showing more or less abstract heads, this one should be viewed from several angles. There are several faces hidden in the design, some of them monstrous, and if you look with a void mind you may find all sorts of bizarre ideas suggesting themselves

296 Visions of Taliesin

to you. Many Celtic artists were aware of the power of subliminals and made regular use of them.

Bottom right: A gold coin attributed to the Osimii people, 20mm, from Brittany. This coin is a lovely example of shamanic practice. It shows a human head, in profile, and above the head a bestial head, also in profile, which could be a bear. Of course, such an image invites a lot of speculation. Is this a sorcerer wearing a bear-head? A warrior with a bear-helmet? Do we see a bard or druid transforming into an animal, or an animal spirit descending to obsess a human being? Should we consider the being as human or divine? Quite a few Celtic deities used to appear with and as bears, such as the gods Artaius and Matunus, and the goddesses Andarta and Artio. In Celtic myths, beasts could represent deities, and this makes it possible that our beast-headed sorcerer is actually 'assuming a god form'. Sex is another interesting issue. A good many Celtic coins show humans who cannot be classed as 'male' or 'female', apparently on purpose. Indeed, these humans are often so undefined or abstract that they invite interpretations as abstract consciousness, or as souls freed from the limits of the flesh. Consider it a key. People who define themselves by their sexual roles stand few chances of realising a consciousness which goes beyond sex, and even beyond humanity.



19 The Cauldron of Ceridwen

Several shamanic and religious systems make use of drugs. Participants of the 'Native American church', which blends Amerindian with Christian ideas, regularly eat mescaline in their worship and, as they put it, talk with Jesus. Similar customs are well documented from various South American cultures. The old custom of head-hunting, as it used to be practised by such cultures as the Jivaro or the Achuara of the tropical rain forest often made use of drugs. Before a neighbouring village was attacked, the local shaman used to go on a trip with the young warriors. This was meant to strengthen their power-animals and to send them against the power beasts of the enemy settlement. Apart from the regular use of yaye and obscure jungle creepers, these head hunters made use of guarana (a plant containing massive amounts of caffeine) which gave them the stamina and the nervous tension to travel for days without sleep or food. In the ritual purification after the hunt, tobacco was chewed or dissolved in water and drunk. As one successful head hunter told it to Baumann and Patzelt (1978), he usually retires to an isolated purification hut after the slaying, where he drinks lots of tobacco water and dreams of the eternal war. It doesn't take much to make some people happy.

To this day, the Huichol people of Mexico go on a pilgrimage to pick their sacred mescaline buttons. These have to be 'hunted' in Wirikuta, the land of origin, with the help of a deer deity. The pilgrimage is briefly described in *Shamanic Voices* (Halifax) and treated in more detail by Barbara G. Myerhoff in her *Peyote Hunt*. According to Huichol belief,

only the peyote from Wirikuta, which has been gathered and prepared under strict ritual conditions, is pure and gives sacred visions. Ordinary peyote, as bought on the market, is considered impure and likely to produce dangerous, if not disastrous visions. Quite obviously, each soil of peyote produces visions, and no doubt a chemical laboratory could not distinguish between one sort or another. The quality of the visions, their meaning and validity, seems to depend on the beliefs and expectations of the person who takes it. Vedic literature makes much of a sacred substance called soma, which was described as a drug as well as a deity. Soma, and its Iranian counterpart haoma, remains a riddle to modern researchers. Dr. Wasson has attempted to identify soma with the Fly Agaric mushroom (*Amanita muscaria*) on the ground that the Aryan invaders of India lost its secret when they left the mountain country where the mushroom lives in spruce and birch forests, and moved into the dry Indian plains. While the use of fly agaric can easily be attested in north Asian and Siberian cultures, its identification as ⁴ 'soma' is far from conclusive. Other authorities have identified soma as hemp, mandrake and half a dozen other psychoactive plants, all of them with a history of ritual use, but none of them quite as the *Rig Veda* describes it. In post-Vedic times, such drugs were used to *simulate* the effect of soma, which explains the many confusing descriptions of the elixir. Certain tantrik traditions continued the use of an elixir called soma, which was apparently not derived from any plants or mushrooms, but distilled in the body of a magically entranced priest/ess. This idea can be traced to the *Rig Veda*: 'The swollen men piss down the fluid set in motion' (RV. 9.74) but as the Vedic descriptions of soma abound in confusing metaphors, many other interpretations can equally be found.

While drugs form an important part of the worship in several shamanic and religious systems, they have also been used for the process of initiation. R. Katz reports that those of the San culture who cannot let go into a shaking trance may use hemp to get going. With the San, the hemp is used to provide access to shaking in beginners, while practised healers do not require it. The drug is a learning aid in this

300 The Cauldron of Ceridwen

context, not a regular part of the healing ceremonies. Hemp was also popular with the fierce horse-riding Skythians of north east Europe. Herodotus, who met these people in the fifth century BC near the Black Sea, claims that they purified themselves after funerals by erecting a tent which functioned as a sauna or sweat-lodge. Inside, they burned hemp on the hot stones 'until they became so happy that they screamed'. Indeed, this hemp-sweat-lodge is not far from the crude stone ovens where Stone Age people used to inhale their weed.

It is quite possible that the Celtic people made use of 'magic mushrooms' (psilocybin), as is evidenced by a coin which shows a person with a curiously disintegrated body picking them (see *Helrunar*, page 58), and the sagas of northern Europe do contain reference to magic potions which could affect loss of memory or falling in love. That such draughts were used for worship is not recorded. Several toxic plants, including Belladonna, were occasionally used to fortify beer among the Celtic and German people, a practice which continued until the 1500s when strict laws were passed to put a stop to it. The *Mabinogi* claims that the Lady Blodeuedd, wife of Llew, was created out of the flowers of oak, broom and meadowsweet, and indeed certain forms of broom contain psychoactive substances. Broom was introduced to Mexico, where the Yaqui Indians soon realised that it could be used for visionary journeys and divination (Ratsch, 1988). The so-called 'flying ointments' from Europe are a well known case of drug use for religious purposes. In the witches' trials, elixirs, potions and ointments used to play an important part, and many of their alleged ingredients - thorn-apple, belladonna, henbane, wild lettuce, mandrake roots, etc., are definitely psychoactive. Whether the witches actually used such preparations is a different question. Lucius Apuleius (124-180) mentions their use in his famous novel, and from that point on common superstition linked the witches with ointments that gave the power to transform or fly. The church people who tortured those witches and sorcerers were keen to hear confessions that involved such drugs, just as they were keen on certain sexual customs, and usually they got exactly what they wanted. Recipes for 'witch's ointments' go back to

the 16th century, when many learned doctors attempted to reconstruct the mixture, making use of several dozen more or less psychoactive plants. In the records of the church, only poppy is mentioned (sleeping poppy has been used in middle Europe from c. 5000 BC), and the emphasis lay on such items as the fat of unbaptised infants, which says more about the torturers than the so-called witches. In the 18th and 19th centuries the majority of the 'flying ointment' recipes were invented, many of them including plants that were definitely not part of an old Pagan tradition, as they had not existed in old Europe (see Ratsch). Church records claimed, with monotonous repetitiveness, that the witches used to anoint themselves. Then they supposedly flew to their Sabbath where they orgiastically worshipped some horned deity, or a big black man, both of which were capable of transforming their shape as they willed. I very much doubt that such drugs are useful for 'flying'. Astral projection is an art that requires a moderately clear head and a steady imagination. To get bizarre visions of the more incoherent type, such ointments are probably efficient enough. The nude dances around the Sabbath-goat may well have arisen from the lecherous imagination of church people whose only drug was righteous wrath - one of the worst consciousness states the human mind can produce. It would be easy to assume that having visions and taking drugs go hand in hand if it weren't for a number of shamanic and religious systems where people get quite as visionary as drug-users without the ingestion of any psychoactive substance. Most of the San people require no drugs for their healing dances, as shaking is quite enough to make them ecstatic.

Inuit healers, living in the frozen Arctic, see few plants in their environment, let alone psychoactive ones. Such people come to see the spirits when they are alone, outside, in the long Arctic night. No doubt exhaustion and crisis play an important part in the transformation of their consciousness. Japanese trance mediums thrive on fasting and cold showers; other systems make use of heat or any other strong natural experience. Indeed, quite a few shamans seem to require no special outside stimulus to get ecstatic and visionary. Likewise, mysticism offers some beautiful examples. St. Francis of Assisi was sober

302 The Cauldron of Ceridwen

enough when he retired to his little island and began preaching to the birds and beasts. Meister Eckhart, who split open a piece of wood only to find Jesus revealed inside, was quite as visionary as any modern acid-head. Myrddin Wyllt, the mad Merlin of history, required no drugs when he dwelled in the snowy forests of Celyddon, chanting prophecy to a pig and an apple tree. In all probability, these people, and countless other mystics all over the world, required no drugs to enjoy their states of ecstasy and rapture. May I propose that these people learned to produce their own psychoactive drugs right inside their own brains?

Let me explain in more detail. Modern brain research indicates that our brains are capable of producing an amazing amount of chemical substances. These brain chemicals produce our emotions for instance, our moods and feelings. They make us alert or sleepy, interested or detached, allow us to fall in love or wallow in depression, give us anger and peace, joy and fear, to name just a few of many hundred possible consciousness states. People learn to produce specific emotions to suit certain situations - learn to respond to certain stimuli with a suitable chemical cocktail leading to the desired consciousness. All consciousness states which we experience during the day require a blend of very specific brain chemicals, not to mention such variables as brain wave rhythms, nervous systems, parts of the brain, and so on. This insight has led a lot of scientists to declare that consciousness is a chemical phenomenon.

So, if you see someone sexy and feel lust, this happens as parts of your mind have learned to recognise and respond to certain visual stimuli by flooding your system with hormones and neurotransmitters that put you in a mood for love-making. People learn how to 'fall in love', that is, they learn how to produce the chemicals that do the job. Surprisingly enough, common superstition claims that people make other people happy, or angry, or whatever. 'You make me feel like dancing' and the like are common expressions of sloppy thinking. Then, half a year later, people find that the 'spell' doesn't work any more, that 'love is gone' and whose fault is this anyway? Have you ever considered that 'being in love' does not happen by chance but requires mainte-

nance? If 'you make me feel like dancing', this means that you do something which I have learned to respond to by producing a lot of consciousness-changing chemicals which make me want to dance. It is my brain which decides 'what a nice stimulus', and my brain which produces all those loving feelings. The funny thing is that few people care to know what they are doing to themselves. 'We fell in love' sounds much more romantic than saying 'you made yourself love me while I made myself love you', let alone suggesting that the loving feelings do not come from the partner but are induced by one's own brain. In our upside-down world, people like to believe that love comes and goes as fate has it, and usually enough, at some point, both partners get bored, stop loving the other, and blame her/him for 'having changed' or some such crime. That lovers' quarrels can be so vicious may well be due to the fact that here we have two addicts who blame each other for having stopped the supply of happiness-inducing chemicals.

If you believe that your partner makes you happy, you depend on her/him. Would you dare to assume responsibility for your own consciousness? People can learn to love other people, they can also learn to love the same person again. People can even learn to love pets, music, scenery, and even more abstract notions, such as ideals, spirits or gods, which says a lot about the flexibility of the human mind when it comes to finding stimuli to get excited about. 'Love' is an emotion people produce for themselves. Usually they blame their partner for it, which is a clever way of evading responsibility. In the same fashion, they claim that certain persons make them angry, or annoyed, or bored, and another 333 emotions, all of which are produced by their own brain chemicals. Well, if I say 'you make me X', this frame of belief implies that I am innocent and can't do anything about it. If I say that it is me who makes myself X, I am responsible for X, and have the option of changing it.

There is a chemistry to emotion. You learn to associate certain stimuli with specific emotional responses. The fact that these associations are not in-built but learned is a great blessing to all of us. Anything that has been learned can be learned differently any time you will. You

304 The Cauldron of Ceridwen

don't have to depend on any stimuli when you know that it is your own mind that does the trick.

Some researchers (I forgot who) have claimed that during the last months of pregnancy, many women are soothed from within. Their mind-chemistry is said to release lots of endorphins, chemicals which function as natural tranquillisers, so they can peacefully watch their belly grow. Their husband's minds, by comparison, do not tend to release endorphins at the time, which may explain their deplorable tendency to worry and chew finger nails. Some time after giving birth, the mother's endorphin supply is drastically reduced. This can produce attacks of panic and all sorts of nasty withdrawal symptoms. Several sorts of yoga breathing exercises tend to calm and soothe the mind. I look forward to studies on the question of whether they release endorphins. Here we come to a crucial point. Why do endorphins work? One common answer is that they so closely resemble opiates, only that they are produced by the brain/body refinery, and not by poppy flowers. More properly, I would like to say 'opiates work as they so closely resemble endorphins'.

All Psychoactive Drugs are Fakes

The psychoactive substance of the peyote-cactus, the alkaloid mescaline, is chemically similar to the brain hormone noradrenaline (norepinephrine). Morning glory seeds, psilocybin mushrooms and LSD contain psychoactive substances that resemble the brain hormone tryptamine and its derivative, serotonin. Albert Hofmann, who discovered LSD by accident, compared the efficiency of psychoactive drugs with a set of keys. These keys so closely resemble the keys used by our own brains that they fit the same keyholes and effectively change consciousness (1979). The 'psychedelic drugs' do not add anything new to the brain. They work as they pretend to be a chemical which is already there, which the brain knows, uses and recognises naturally.

People who take acid give themselves an overdose of a substance that is already present in their brain, and hallucinate until their brains have neutralised the chemical imbalance. Humans have been tripping as long as human history, and no doubt many magicians, mystics and madmen learned to produce their own acid right inside the brain. It is only synthetic acid, of doubtful purity and available outside of a religious or magical context, which is a modern invention.

One of the curious aspects in the use of consciousness-changing drugs is the difficulty in predicting the effect. Think of times when you were drunk. What special effects did the alcohol have? Can you remember times when drink made you silly, serious, happy, peaceful, restless, agitated, angry, edgy, loud, introverted, comatose, or sent you dancing on the table? No doubt you have experienced several of these, and other responses. Even a simple mug of beer may make you sleepy at one time, and cheerful at another. That's a lot of variation for a single, and fairly simple, chemical substance. Crowley, in his *Diary of a Drug Fiend* points out that some heroin addicts use their drug to get out of bed, and likewise use it at night to go to sleep. If the drug only had one special effect, this would be impossible.

Some people smoke dope first thing in the morning, and all through the day, to get going, to be active, to relax, to be extrovert, to be introvert, to cheer up, to calm down, and of course to go to sleep. Somehow the drug seems to work exactly as they wish it to. For a drug, this is certainly unusual behaviour. Stranger still are some insights given by Christian Ratsch (1988), who cites studies which indicate that THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), the basic psychoactive substance of hashish, seems to have no direct effect on consciousness. Instead, it tends to trigger an enzymatic process within the body, which leads to the desired change of consciousness. This complicated process, as Ratsch says, has to be learned. Chemists have analysed a lot of plants that different cultures use as drugs or sacraments. Not all of them contain psychoactive ingredients. The mountain primrose, for instance, occurs in numerous folk tales of northern Europe as a flower that opens the gates to the deep. People who carry a primrose are said to find that the earth opens

306 The Cauldron of Ceridwen

before them, offering access to the fabulous hoards of 'the dwellers from under the hills'. Numerous shamanic cultures in Siberia, the Himalayas, northern India and Pakistan believe that shamans get their visionary and magical powers after inhaling the smoke of juniper wood. In some parts of the South Seas (New Pommern) the greatest magic comes from ginger. Sorcerers use ginger, leaves and roots, for healing, love spells, curses, transformation and astral journeys. These powers lie latent in the plant. It is only after the plant has been activated by a skilled sorcerer that they come out. Vervain was one of the sacred plants of the Celtic people. Pliny informs us that it was used for divination by the 'Magi' (Druids) of Gaul, who claimed that it fulfils all desires, heals all diseases, induces friendship 'and other nonsense' (Pliny's comment), provided it was picked in the evening when Sirius rises, after a sacrifice of beeswax and honey to the earth. Also, the sun and moon should not be visible at the time. A circle should be scratched around the plant, using an iron blade, and the plant should be picked with the left hand, which goes to show that Druidism was an exact science, where it comes to belief in complications. As far as modern science knows, none of these plants contains psychedelic substances. When they work, this is not a question of plant chemistry but of brain chemistry, and the power of belief. A similar phenomenon takes place when a devout catholic partakes of the mass, or when a devout chela gets the guru's thumb pressed on the brow. Analysing the mass wafers, or the guru's thumb will tell us very little about the effect they had on the mind of the believer. Likewise, in our culture, a lot of people experience pain relief within minutes after taking some pill or medicine. Now, most pills require more time to dissolve, to be transported and to act than a few minutes. The relief that people experience so soon after ingestion comes from their belief, and the expectation that pills work.

The 'placebo response' is one of the most interesting discoveries in the field of experimental medicine. If you give a person a harmless substance claiming that it is a powerful drug, and if that person gets effects from it as if it really were that drug, this is certainly a miracle. The placebo effect is a sure sign how creative and miraculous the mind

can be when it comes to simulating and producing interesting and useful consciousness states. Many doctors shy away from this phenomenon, and only use placebos when they see no other way, as the placebo-response seems so dangerously close to quackery. 'It is only belief is one way to explain it, and 'belief certainly enjoys a dubious reputation in the scientific environment, where physicians like to believe that they know what they are doing. Now the efficiency of a placebo relies not only on the belief and expectation of the patient, but also on mind/body's ability to simulate and produce the desired effect. This means that the patient produces the proper medicine for her or himself.

Indeed, this happens not only when a patient receives a placebo, but also when s/he is given a 'real' drug. Rossi (1986) cites research that indicates that about 55% of all effects people get from drugs are produced by the mind-body chemistry:

While morphine obviously has more potent analgesic effects than aspirin, about 55% of the potency *of each* is a placebo response.

In their excellent *Beliefs*, Dilts, Hallbom and Smith (1990) give some fascinating examples of how placebos can stimulate changes of consciousness:

In the case of pain, research has shown that placebos can work as well as morphine in 51 -70% of the patients. Another study looked at placebos from the opposite point of view. In this study, the researchers wanted to find out how well the placebo-responders reacted to real drugs, so they gave them morphine. They found out that 95% of the placebo responders did respond in a positive way to the morphine. In comparison, only 54% of people who did not respond to placebos got relief with real morphine - a difference of 41%. People with a high response expectancy for relief got relief. With this kind of data you have to wonder about the efficiency of certain medicines.

The book goes on with studies on people who thought they were drinking alcohol, and got drunk on a placebo, while others who thought

308 The Cauldron of Ceridwen

they were not getting alcohol, but got some, stayed sober - but read it for yourself, it's well worth it. More important still, it offers insight into the structures of belief, the way belief is formed, maintained and changed, which is of vital importance to the practising magician.

In therapy, a placebo works when the doctor who prescribes it radiates enough 'authority' to make the patient believe that the placebo is the real thing. This method has been used by shamans and sorcerers for millennia. Indeed, quite a few healers acquired a rather shady reputation due to their liberal use of placebos. In a sense we could claim that such healers 'cheat' when they pretend that a placebo is real medicine, and this 'cheating' is essential to make the therapy work. In another sense we might consider the placebo as a means of suggestion, as a stimulus to allow the patient to heal her or himself. Such 'self-healing' may be more genuine than the healing you get through eating pills. Now it is one thing when a healer produces some bizarre medicine (preferably something weird or creepy, possibly still alive...) to treat the overawed patient, and quite another if the healer wants to heal her or himself. If the healer knows that the stuff is a placebo, s/he won't believe in it sufficiently to make it work. One way to avoid this difficulty is tradition, i.e. the healer does not invent new placebos but relies on traditional recipes which everybody believes in, including the healer. Another way is divine blessing, i.e. 'the spirits' provide a visionary insight, which makes the healer believe in the efficiency of some new plant, dead insect or power object. A third way would be to believe in an agency (gods, spirits, etc) capable of transforming a profane substance into a medicine of power. A more modern attitude would be to believe in the brain/body complex and its ability to produce better medicine than the chemical industry. Would you like to believe so? There are ways of learning such a belief.

As you have seen, there are several ways in which consciousness is being produced, and changed under will. Brain chemistry, with its thousands of highly refined cocktails, is but one element in the whole. Brain waves, as discussed in the chapter on rhythm, are another element, and so is your nervous system. Energy-tonus also seems to

provide an interesting field of study. Certain consciousness states seem to alter the Ch'i flow, the fields of bio-energy, which in turn changes awareness. I often experience motion in my energy-field as I change from one consciousness to another. Such effects can be noticed in shivers, a tingling along the spine, or perhaps a fit of yawning. Do you know the energy-distribution in your body when you've spent a day writing or thinking hard? Usually so much energy seems to go to the head that it's hard to estimate if one is hungry, or has a cramped behind. On the other hand, an awareness of real hunger can keep so much attention (and energy) in the belly that it becomes difficult to think properly. Thus, distribution of life-energy in the body seems one of the keys to awareness. Given these, and probably several yet undiscovered methods of changing and producing consciousness-states, it may seem that there exists a vast scope of awareness which we can cook up in the cauldron of Ceridwen. For advanced helrunars, who have established a good system of communication with their deep minds, this process can be surprisingly simple. I would like to offer you a basic outline of a method which is useful to design consciousness and trance states. Its efficiency depends on the question how well are you in touch with yourself, and how easily you co-operate with your deep mind. The basic method of designing a consciousness state requires skill in ideomotoric signalling, which allows your deep mind to give you simple yes/no answers. I suggest you use signals which can't be faked consciously. For example I get a twitch or jolt in the back for 'yes', and this reflex is something I can't produce consciously - at least not as well. The practice of experiencing this chosen consciousness requires that you consult your deep mind as you go along, and refine a sentience that is attractive to all parts - conscious or not - of your self.

We could start by inducing a pleasant state of, say, rapture. If you like rapture, go ahead, but if that word seems unattractive to you for some reason, replace it with one that seems more suitable. The following method is useful to design a wide variety of consciousness states, so choose one that you'd really love to experience. All you need for this working is the co-operation of your deep mind, and the ability

310 The Cauldron of Ceridwen

to ask it, and to receive clear 'yes' and 'no' answers in reply.

First of all, I would like to ask you to remember a few occasions when you experienced rapture. It doesn't matter if this occurred while you made love, during a ritual, while dancing, in trance, on drugs, or if it simply happened naturally. Remember a few times when you were as rapt as possible

1. Ask your deep mind if it likes states of rapture. If yes, continue. If no, find out if your deep mind would prefer to produce some other sort of consciousness. If the 'yes' is hesitant, find something you would rather experience, some sentience that really seems attractive. In this sort of trance magick, a hesitant 'yes' is not good enough.

2. Ask your deep mind to *remember* ten occasions when you experienced rapture. This can be done consciously, i.e. you are actually aware which occasions your deep mind selects, but the process works more elegantly, and much faster, when your deep mind simply informs you that it has found ten samples, without informing you what exactly those ten occasions were.

3. Ask your deep mind to compare those ten occasions, and to find out which aspects of experience they had in common. Ask your deep mind to find out what was best for you in those occasions.

This step is meant to refine the quintessence of the best rapture you remember. What we want is specifically *those* aspects of rapture-experience that really did you good. If you experienced rapture while fasting (in one of those samples), you want the ecstatic awareness, but not the nasty side effects of fasting, such as low energy, dizziness or the occasional cramp. The same goes for occasions of rapture in states of exhaustion or crisis. What we want is the very cream of rapture, and as few negative side effects as possible.

Your deep mind is quite capable of discovering which elements are common to your very best states of ecstatic rapture. Ask your deep mind to give you a clear 'yes' signal when it has done so - there is no need to inform your conscious identity about just what it has discovered, as you wouldn't understand most of it anyway.

4. It is possible to work with the material you have (unconsciously)

refined so far. If you want to make it even better, you could also ask your deep mind to *imagine* ten occasions when you will experience intense rapture in future. When it has done so (you'll get your 'yes' signal) you can ask it to find out about the best aspects and common elements of those ten samples, and refine what is best about your future rapture, just as you did with your past rapture. Ask your deep mind to find out the very best from past and future, and to give you a 'yes' signal when it has found it. The idea behind this stage is that we are not just trying to repeat past experiences, however ecstatic and joyous, but to optimise them so some better consciousness can be developed.

5. Ask your deep mind if it could, and wants to, produce a consciousness in which you experience your very best rapture for a controlled period of time. A time limit is quite useful for the first experiments. You could ask for a specific span of time ('would you please make me experience intense rapture for half an hour, after which I will come into a pleasant everyday-awareness automatically?') or you could connect your rapture with some event ('would you keep me in rapture as long as I walk in this forest and return me to normal awareness as soon as I come out of the trees?'). An attitude of 'as long as we like' is even better, once one has gained some experience with this sort of magick, and trusts the deep. Include the option of returning to ordinary consciousness whenever it seems appropriate. Set a frame for your experience that suits all of you.

6. Ask if there are any parts of you that object to a rapture-consciousness. If you get a 'yes' to this one, get in touch with those parts and find out what exactly they object to. Maybe they have a good reason, such as 'eat something first' or 'you're not fit enough today' or whatever. This step is essential for the ecology of your mind. As long as parts of you object, your experience will only be partial. If parts of you worry about something, it's no use expecting them to co-operate in experiencing rapture. Neither can you force or trick them. The best solution is to find out what they worry about, and to find a solution. Then they will be more inclined to become ecstatic, and join the other parts in enthusiastic co-operation. When all the parts of the whole co-

312 The Cauldron of Ceridwen

operate, your rapture will be enthusiastic indeed. (More detail on this sort of communication with the subconscious mind can be found in the excellent *Frogs into Princes* and *Refraining* by Bandler and Grinder. Do the exercises and learn how to be friends with yourself).

7. Ask your deep mind if it wants to produce a good rapture-experience, under specific conditions, now. If the 'yes' is enthusiastic, go ahead. If it is hesitant, go back to step 6 and find out if you have overlooked something.

8. Ask if you should do something to help the process. With me, it is usually simply that I rest and wait a moment, with closed eyes, while the deep mind begins its transformation.

9. Ask all of yourself if they will produce this rapture now. If 'yes', say 'thank you' and enjoy what follows.

10. After the experience, have a moment of rest and give your thanks.

I would ask you to consider this method as a form of learning. This is an important issue: you are not getting something complete. The first experiments are opportunities to experiment and improve. It takes a while, and several occasions, to refine a really good rapture-sentience. If you use this method, your deep mind will offer some consciousness to you. It is your job to find out what you like about it, and to ask your deep mind to amplify those elements, until you get a sentience that suits all of you. Sometimes it's useful to ask for fine-tuning, such as 'could I have more happiness' or 'could I feel more energetic' to make the consciousness really excellent. Another good question is 'deep mind, do you know any way to make this experience better?' As usually, it does. After a couple of experiments, you will become more daring, and the awareness you distil in the cauldron will improve in quality. Sometimes it can be useful to integrate the body. To some people, rapture means 'staring wide-eyed and void-minded into a world of miracles'. If this is the case, you can make it easier by relaxing, sitting still, and maybe allowing your body to sway a little. If rapture means 'jumping around, howling with joy' to you, physical motion is the thing you'll need to get going. What you have done in the exercise is to design

a rudimentary consciousness. Though this process may have seemed a little complicated, you will find that the steps were built up in a sequence leading to a new sentience. Once you have designed your new consciousness, give it a name, and the next time you want it, ask your deep mind to produce it directly. If your deep mind agrees, you'll be surprised how fast your consciousness can change.

As mentioned before, a great variety of consciousness-states can be simulated, and better still, optimised, by the use of this method. The fun gets even better when we come to inventing new states of consciousness and trance. A few years ago, while developing these methods, I was busy studying the poetry of Taliesin. One day, as I was walking in the forest, I asked my deep mind (for the fun of it) if it could produce a 'Taliesin consciousness'. The 'yes' signal I received was enthusiastic indeed, and so we proceeded. For this process, we used a similar method as the one outlined above. I asked my deep mind to refine the essence of the Taliesin consciousness, and to induce it. After a moment of sitting silently, I opened my eyes to the marvels around. From one instant to the next, the forest was transformed. Flashing lights, glowing 'fields of colour', a bit of yawning, and all of a sudden the world seemed so new. The wild wood looked so fresh and unique as if I had never seen it before. Each blade of grass had a meaning in its curve, each leaf told a tale, each spider web contained a mandala of world-weaving wisdom. My mind so simple, so wide, so easily overwhelmed by the fullness of experience... I sat there for a long time, motionless except for the eyes, thinking very slowly, if at all. Soon the silence became like a cloak, veiling and healing my mind, and then the words welled up. There are old-and long forgotten myths in the wild wood. Strange stories of other ages are hiding in the brambles, are whispered by the oak leaves, arc danced by shadows under twilight trees. I found fragments of the Taliesin songs emerging from the cauldron of my mind, and heard voices speaking in what might be Celtic tongues. They seemed familiar, but I could not understand them. Getting up from my resting place was something of an achievement, the ground being so far away. I found that I could move and walk, if very slowly, as there was so much to delight



in. There were vaguely sensed myths in each blueberry bush, hiding in the corners of the twisting path, revealing themselves in dew soaked moss, rotten wood and the eruption of the foliage as wood pigeons take to flight, their fast wings whistling in the wind. Each site a place of power, inviting to rest and slowly melt into the soil... then the words came. Fast and furious they welled out of the deep, and I found myself praying, then eulogising the great wonder, the great beauty of the living world.

As I later found out, it took me more than two hours to walk about a kilometre, which may say something about the intensity of my perception. A few weeks later, when trying the Taliesin sentience with a like-minded friend, it took us more than five hours to explore less than a kilometre of a happily gurgling forest stream. To this day, the Taliesin consciousness is one of my favourites. It is a state of such intense perception that ordinary awareness seems pale and vapid by comparison. This does not mean that it is all fun and joy. Some experiences can be rather revolting when sensed too intensely. I remember coming upon a sandstone quarry in a forest in southern Germany. It towered like a huge, open wound, angry and inflamed, out of a sickly pine forest, and taught me a lesson on how closely associated with the scenery I tend to be when in Taliesin consciousness. Indeed, scenery, climate, time of day and season of the year all strongly influence the experience and the emotions that go with it.

It is an interesting side effect that the Taliesin-consciousness burns up a lot of food. The same phenomenon commonly happens during extended seething trances. It can lead to a low blood sugar level, which in turn can manifest as cramp, edginess and mild annoyance. Such effects can ruin the quality of your consciousness and take the joy out of the experience. They can be avoided by eating once in a while, and by the use of Dextrose if need be. Another interesting issue is coming out of the Taliesin consciousness. The change often makes me yawn intensely, and body energy seems to re-align itself somehow. Then I find myself rather dissociated from scenery and atmosphere, and often a bit weary and drained. Sure, the forest still appears much as it did a moment

316 The Cauldron of Ceridwen

ago, but somehow lacks the meaning and the fascination it held a moment before. The first couple of experiments I felt as if I had been kicked out of paradise. Then ordinary awareness sets in. I begin to move faster, and life goes on.

Soon I discovered that after a few hours in Taliesin consciousness, all lucid and sparkle, it does me worlds of good to rest in darkness for a while. The next state we developed was an Afagddu-consciousness, dwelling in the twilight of the undefined. Other trances and consciousness states have been discovered. When Kenneth Grant published *The Wisdom of S'Iba. The Doctrine of Self- Neither Attained Through the Bliss of Non-Mobile Becoming (Outer Gateways, 1994)*, I was delighted to ask my deep mind, gods, spirits, et al., if they could produce a STba sentience. They could, and did, the resulting consciousness plunging me in a sense of silence and absence that defies description. Much as in the Taliesin-consciousness, all perception became intensified, but unlike it, there was no will to pray or chant, but an increasing urge to dissolve, to embrace the self of absence and nothing that creates the world of things that Taliesin gets so excited about. The 'inner silence' one can produce by conscious effort is but a joke compared to the silence and vacuity the deep mind can produce on request. The next question was if the experience of such silence and absence can be communicated to others. A friend who kindly volunteered went through the method outlined above with me. I asked her deep mind if it knew of the self beyond form and absence, the self in the silence beyond silence and sound, the self in the darkness beyond light and dark, in the voidness that was before the void and the forms came to be. The self that wears a thousand masks, while being none, the self that remains as it never came to be. Paradoxical as this may sound, it still made lots of sense to her deep mind. Then I asked her deep mind to remember five occasions when she had experienced this incomprehensible self, to imagine five occasions when she will experience it, and just what is essential to the experience? We used the method as described previously. Her deep mind was very enthusiastic and soon enough she was in a sentience where it took her almost half an hour to find out if she

could move at all.

This, however, is just the beginning. What trances and sentiences could you invent that really get you going? I've learned some that have me sense intensely, but provide a good energy tonus, so that I can walk (or fly?) swiftly and find it easy to climb uphill. In others, I tend to hug trees and touch plants a lot. Some have me dancing as I walk, or make me giggle and laugh for hours, and there is no end to the possibilities in sight. What consciousness states would you like to develop? Would you like to sense the world as Myrddin did? Do you know the difference between obsession by a deity, and the consciousness of it, and its expression in a trance? There is a difference between 'trance' and 'consciousness', as you may find out, by asking your deep mind to produce them. Would you like a nature walk in Niflheim consciousness? How about a dance session in Lilith trance? Would you like a simulation of Aleister Crowley consciousness, or an Austin Spare awareness? As long as such terms make sense to your deep mind, you will find that you can access them.



Selected Bibliography

Agrippa von Nettesheim *De Occulta Philosophia*, Greno Nordlingen, 1984

Aitken, Hannah (Ed.) *Marchen aus Schottland* Rowohlt, Hamburg, 1993

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Appendix Indo-European Roots, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1981

Andreas, Connirae & Steve *Change your Mind - and Keep the Change*, Real People Press, Moab, 1987

Apuleius, Lucius *Der Goldene Esel*, Insel Verlag, 1975

Archaeologische Ausgrabungen in Baden- Wurttemberg 1981, Theiss Verlag, Stuttgart

Bandler, Richard *Using your Brain for a Change*, Real People Press, Moab, 1985

Magic in Action, Meta Publications, 1984

Bandler, Richard, & Grinder, John *Trance-formations*, Real People Press, Moab, 1981

Baumann, P. & Patzelt, E. *Erinnerungen eines Kopffjagers*, Fischer, Frankfurt, 1981

Bertiaux, Michael *The Voudon Gnostic Workbook*, Magickal Childe, NY, 1988

The Black Book of Carmarthen, trans. Pennar, Llanerch, Felinfach, 1989

Blacker, Carmen *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan*, Unwin Paperbacks, London, 1975

320 Bibliography and Index

- Boron, Robert de *Merlin, Kunder des Grals*, Ogham Verlag, Stuttgart, 1980
- Bramly, Serge *Macumba. Die magische Religion Brasiliens*, Bauer Verlag, Freiburg, 1978
- Carmichael, Alexander *Carmina Gadelica Hymns & Incantations*, Floris Books, Edinburgh, 1992
- Casson, Lionel *The Barbarian Kings*, Stonehenge Press, 1982
- Chertok, Leon *Hypnose*, Kindler Verlag, Miinchen, 1978
- Chesi, Gert *Voodoo: Afrikas geheime Macht*, Perlinger, Worgl, 1979
Die Medizin der schwarzen Gotter, J. & V., Wien, 1989
- Chia, Mantak *Awaken Healing Energy Through the Tao. The Taoist Secret of Circulating Internal Power*, Aurora Press, NY, 1983
- Cotte, Roger *Die Symbolik der Musik*, Diederichs, Munchen, 1992
- Cowan, James *Mysteries of the Dream Time*, Prism Press, Bridport, 1992
- Crowley, Aleister *The Holy Books*, Sangreal, Texas, Dallas, 1972
Magick, ed. Symonds & Grant, Weiser, NY, 1974
The Vision and the Voice, Sangreal, Dallas, 1972
Liber Al Vel Legis, Golden Dawn Publications, Oxford
'Energized Enthusiasm', *Equinox* Vol I, No. 9, spring 1913
- Darnton, Robert *Der Mesmerismus und das Ende der Aufklarung in Frankreich*, Ullstein Verlag, Frankfurt/M, 1986 (Harvard College, 1968)
- Delank, H.W. *Neurologie*, Enke Verlag, Stuttgart, 1981
- Deren, Maya *Divine Horsemen: Voodoo Gods of Haiti*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1953
- Diederichs, Ulf (ed.) *Hessische Sagen*, Diederichs, Koln, 1978
- Dilts, Robert, Hallbom, T, & Smith, S. *Beliefs: Pathways to Health and Well-being*, Metamorphous Press, Portland, 1990
- Dobler, Hanns Ferdinand *Die Germanen*, Prisma Verlag, 1975
- Dumezil, Georges *Loki*, Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1959
Early Irish Myths and Sagas, trans. Gantz, Penguin, London, 1981
Edda trans. K. Simrock, Cotta, Stuttgart, 1896
- Ettmtiller, Ludwig *Altnordischer Sagenschatz*, Magnus, Stuttgart

- Flatischler, R. *Ta Ke Ti Na - The Path to Rhythm*, Liferhythm, IWO
- Flatischler, R. & Maxfield, M. *Erweitertes Bewusstsein durch Rhythmus*, in *Welt Sprache Rhythms* 94
- Fortune, Dion *The Secrets of Dr. Taverner*, Llewellyn, St. Paul, 1978
- Frazer, Sir J.G. *The Golden Bough*, Macmillan Press, London, abridged ed. 1978
- Friedrich, A. & Buddruss, G. *Schamanengeschichten aus Sibirien*, Barth Verlag, Munchen, 1955
- Fries, Jan *Visual Magick*, Mandrake of Oxford, 1992
- Helrunar*, Mandrake of Oxford, 1993
- Gerald of Wales *The Journey through Wales/The Description of Wales*, Translation Thorpe, Penguin Books, 1978
- Golther, Wolfgang *Handbuch der germanischen Mythologie* (1908), repr. Magnus Verlag, Kettwig, 1987
- Grant, Kenneth *Cults of the Shadow*, Muller, London, 1975
- Outside the Circles of Time*, Muller, London, 1980
- Hecates Fountain*, Skoob, London, 1992
- Outer Gateways*, Skoob, London, 1994
- Graves, Robert *Greek Myths*, Cassell, London, 1965
- Halifax, Joan *Shamanic Voices*, Penguin Books, London, 1979
- Harner, M. *The Way of the Shaman*, Bantam Books, 1982
- Heinze, Ruth-Inge *Trance and Healing in Southeast Asia Today*, White Lotus Co. Bangkok, 1988
- Herkunftsworterbuch Etymologie*, Duden #7, Duden Verlag, Mannheim, 1989
- Herrmann, F.-R. (ed.) *Die Vorgeschichte Hessens*, Theiss Verlag, Stuttgart, 1990
- Hines, D. *Magic in the Mountains*, Great Eagle Publishing, Issaquah, Wa, 1993
- Hutton, Ronald *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1991
- James, E.O. *The Nature and Function of Priesthood*, Thames & Hudson, London
- Kalevala*, translation Fromm, Reclam, Stuttgart, 1985

322 Bibliography and Index

- Katz, Richard *Boiling Energy: Community Healing Among the Kalahari Kung*, Harvard University Press, 1982
- Die Kelten in Mitteleuropa*, Catalogue, Keltenmuseum, Hallein, Austria, 1980
- Kendrick, T.D. *The Druids*, Banton Press, 1990 (repr. of 1927)
- Kinsley, David *Hindu Goddesses*, University of California Press, 1986
- Koenigswald, W. & Hahn, J. *Jagdtiere und Jäger der Eiszeit*, Theiss Verlag, Stuttgart, 1981
- Kohl-Larsen (ed.) *Die steinerne Herde. Volkssagen aus Lappland* Erich Roth Verlag, Kassel 1975
- Lamont-Brown, Raymond *Chambers Scottish Superstitions*, Chambers, Edinburgh, 1990
- Lengyel, Lancelot *Le Secret des Celtes*, Robert M. Editeur, 1969
- Littmann, Enno *Arabische Geisterbeschwörungen aus Ägypten*, Harrassowitz Verlag, Leipzig, 1950
- Lovecraft, H.P. *At the Mountains of Madness*, Gollancz, London, 1971
The Hauler of the Dark, Gollancz, London, 1951
- The Mabinogion*, translation Gantz, Penguin Books, London, 1976
- Mabinogion Legends*, transl. Lady Guest, facsimile reprint, Llanerch Publishers, Felinfach, 1992
- Maier, Bernhard *Lexikon der keltischen Religion und Kultur*, Kroner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1994
- Matthews, John *Taliesin, Shamanism and the Bardic Mysteries in Britain and Ireland*, Aquarian Press, London, 1991
- May, Jutta *Lappland*, Goldstadt Verlag, Pforzheim, 1983
- Miller, Richard *The Magical and Ritual Use of Herbs*, Destiny Books, NY, 1983
- Monmouth, Geoffrey of *Vita Merlini*, Castrum Peregrini Presse, Amsterdam, 1964
The History of the Kings of Britain Penguin, London, 1966
- Mookerjee, Ajit *Kali: The Feminine Force*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1988
- Myerhoff, Barbara *Peyote Hunt* Cornell University Press, NY, 1974

- Nash, D.W. *Taliesin or the Bards and Druids of Britain*, J Russel Smith, 1858
- Noma #5, *Cincinnati Journal of Ceremonial Magick*, Conquering Child Publ. Ohio, 1983
- Maatian Meditations and Considerations*, Black Moon, Cincinnati, 1993
- Maat Magick*, Weiser, NY 1995
- O'Duinn, Sean *Forbhais Droma Damhghaire* Mercia Press, Dublin, 1992
- Oppitz, Michael *Schamanen im blinden Land*, Syndikat, Frankfurt, 1981
- Pager, Harald *Stone Age Myth and Magic*, Akad. Verlagsanstalt, Graz, 1975
- Paracelsus *Die Geheimnisse*, Dieterich Verlag, Leipzig, 1941
- Rantasalo, A. *Einige Zaubersteine & Zauberpflanzen*, FF Communications # 176, 1959
- Ratsch, Christian *Lexikon der Zauberpflanzen*, VMA Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1988
- Rebling, Eberhard *Die Tanzkunst Indiens*, Heinrichshofens Verlag, Wilhelmshafen, 1982
- Restak, Richard *The Brain*, Bantam Books, NY
- Rigaud, Milo *Secrets of Voodoo*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1969
- The Rig Veda*, trans. Flaherty, Penguin Books, London, 1981
- Rinne, Olga (ed.) *Wie Aua den Geistern geweiht wurde*, Luchterhand, Darmstadt, 1983
- Robinson, Charles A *Concise History of the United Society of Believers Called Shakers* (1893) repr. Hyperion Press, Connecticut, 1975
- Ross, Anne *Pagan Celtic Britain*, Constable, London, 1992
- Rossi, Ernest *The Psychobiology of Mind Body Healing*, Norton, NY, 1986
- Sargent, Denny *Global Ritualism*, Llewellyn, St. Paul, 1994
- Schultes, R. & Hofmann, A. *Plants of the Gods*, McGraw-Hill, Maidenhead, 1979

324 Bibliography and Index

- Schweizerisches Landesmuseum *Gold der Helvetier*, Zurich, 1991
- Semple, Gavin 'Zos-Kia' *An Introductory Essay on the Art and Sorcery of Austin Osman Spare* Fulgur, London 1995
- Skene, W.F. *The Four Ancient Books of Wales* Edmonston and Douglas, 1868
- Shankardevananda Saraswati, Dr Swami. *Amaroli*, Bihar School of Yoga, Monghyr 1978
- Sloterdijk, Peter *Der Zauberbaum*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1987
- Spare, Austin Osman *The Book of Pleasure (Selflove)*, 93 Publ. Montreal, 1975
- The Focus of Life*, Askin, London, 1976
- The Witches Sabbath / Axiomata*, Fulgur, London, 1992
- Squire, Charles *Celtic Myth and Legend*, Newcastle Publishing, 1975
- Stolz, Alfred *Schamanen: Ekstase und Jenseitssymbolik*, Du Mont, Koln, 1988
- Tacitus, Cornelius *Germania*, Reclam Verlag, Stuttgart, 1971, trans. Fuhrmann
- The Tain Bo Cuailnge*, trans. Thomas Kinsella, Oxford University Press, 1970
- Taliesin Poems*, transl. Meirion Pennar, Llanerch Publishers, Felinfach, 1988
- Thomas, Carmen *Ein ganz besonderer Saft - Urin*, VGS, Koln, 1993
- Tolstoy, Nikolai *The Quest for Merlin*, Hamilton, London, 1985
- The Coming of the King*, Corgi Books, London, 1989
- Twain, Mark A *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, 1889
- Ungnad, Arthur *Die Religionen der Babylonier und Assyrer*, Diederichs Verlag, Jena, 1921
- Verleger, August *Taunus Sagen*, Hirschgraben Verlag, Frankfurt, 1960
- Die Volksbücher von D. Johann Faust und Christoph Wagner*, Schunemann Verlag, Bremen, 1980
- Whitson, Robley (ed.) *The Shakers*, Paulist Press, Ramsey, 1983
- Wilhelm, R. (transl.) & Jung, C.G. *Das Geheimnis der Goldenen Blute*, Diederichs, Koln, 1986

Wolf, Hans-Jurgen *Hexenwahn*, Gondrom Verlag, Bindlach, 1994
 Wolfram, Herwig *Geschichte der Goten*, Beck, Munchen, 1979
Wikinger, Warager, Normannen Katalog, Staatl. Museen zu Berlin, 1992

Discography

Good musick for shaking can be found on: *Divine Horseman, the Voodoo Gods of Haiti* by Maya Deren, Lyrichord LLST 7341; *Ricochet*, Tangerine Dream, Virgin Records, CDV 2044

A fascinating expression of Seidr in sound and practice was produced by Amodali and Patrick O'Kill (*Mother Destruction*). Their musick and its manifestation on stage remains an inspiration. My favourite is : *White Rose Live*; CD BCM Kenaz, London WC1N 3XX

Excellent musick for swaying trances was recorded by: Frank Kostler, whose CD *Traumzeit - Didgeridoo and Water*, Gema, LASTHAL 93 is highly recommended.

Siberian shaman's music can be found on: *Nganasan: Shamanic and narrative songs of the Siberian Arctic*, Siberie 1. Musique Du Monde, which includes a seventeen-minute Bear invocation

For shamanistic music and overtone chanting, hear: *Shu-De. Voices from the distant Steppes*, Realworld, UK: CDRW 41.

Ancient song traditions of the Sami people can be found on: *Beavi, Ahcazan* by Nils-Aslak Calkeapaa and Esa Kotilainen which gives fresh life to Joik singing and in the spell binding music of Mari Boine especially *Leahkastin*, Mari Boine, Lean, Polygram International

Nordic song traditions from the medieval period are well reproduced on the enchanting CD *Rosensfole* by Agnes Buen Games and Jan Garbarek, ECM Records.

Bardic music and awareness appears on the numerous albums and CDs by Alan Stivell. His musick has accompanied me for many years and forms the background to much of my writing.

326 Bibliography and Index

Last, there is Chaos Song, which can be studied and imitated by making use of the music of *Magma*. The leader of the group, Christian Vander, is no stranger to obsession and shaking trances, and the music abounds with nightside harmonics. For an introduction try *Attahk*, Magma, Seventh Records and *Udu Wudiu*, Magma, Tomato Music Works, NY